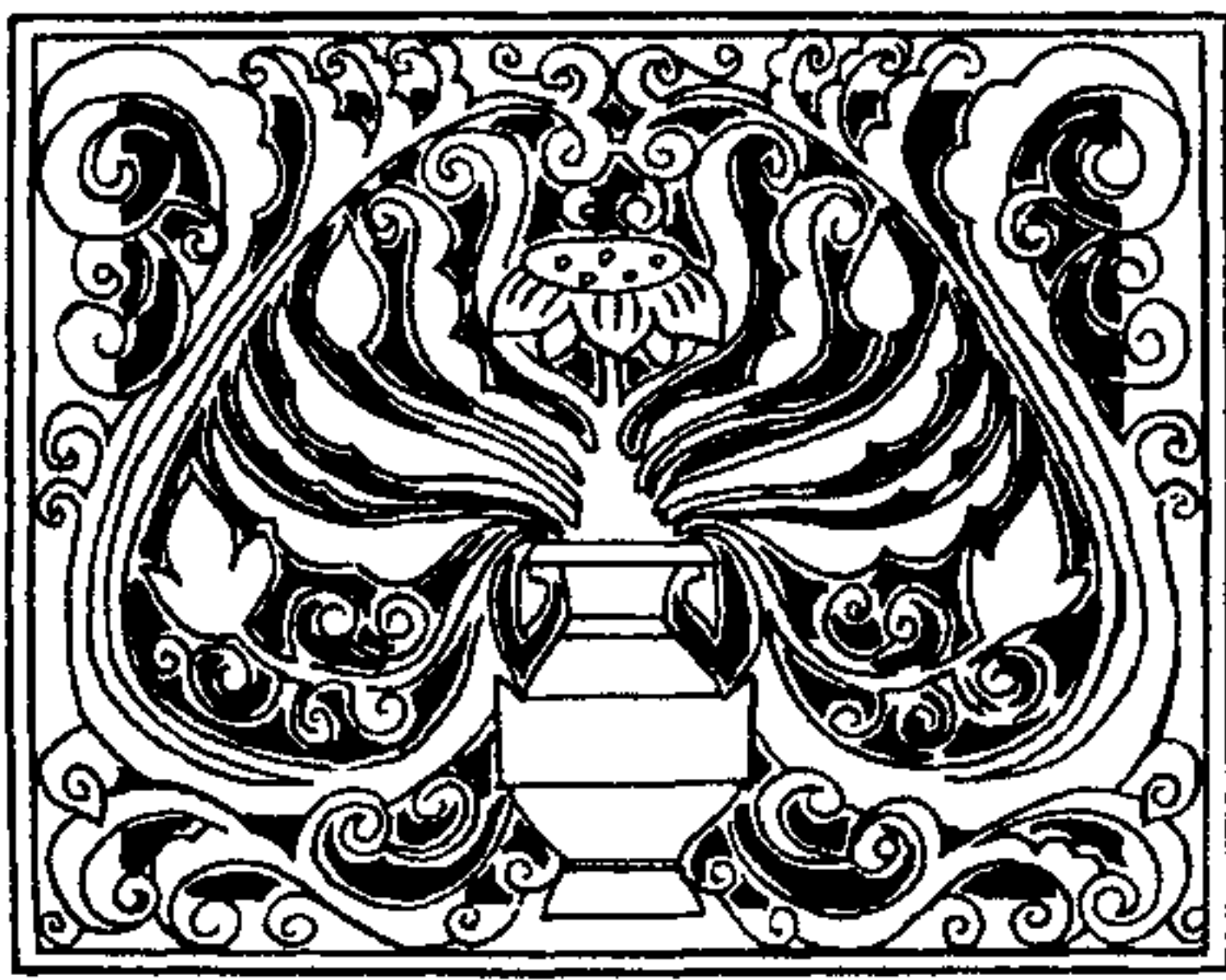




PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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Cover: A view of the Himalayas

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.

Vol. 105

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No. 2

VEDIC PRAYERS

इमा रुद्राय तवसे कपर्दिने
क्षयद्वीराय प्र भरामहे मतीः।
यथा शमसद्विपदे चतुष्पदे
विश्वं पुष्टं ग्रामे अस्मिन्ननातुरम्॥
—Rg Veda, 1.114.1

We offer these hymns to Rudra who has matter hair (Kapardī) and who destroys enemies. We pray that he may graciously cure the illnesses of us human beings and of animals too. By his grace, may everyone in our village be freed from diseases and become hale and hearty.

मृळा नो रुद्रोत नो मयस्कृधि
क्षयद्वीराय नमसा विधेम ते।
यच्छं च योश्च मनुरायेजे पिता
तदश्याम तव रुद्र प्रणीतिषु॥
—Rg Veda, 1.114.2

For our sake, O Rudra, be happy. Later, make us all happy also. We adore you, O destroyer of our enemies, with salutations, or sacrificial offerings. Just as Manu (Pitā) had all diseases cured and fears allayed, may we, too, have similar benefits by your gracious sight (praṇītiṣu).

अश्याम ते सुमतिं देवयज्यया
क्षयद्वीराय तव रुद्र मीढ्वः।
सुम्नायन्निद्विशो अस्माकमा
चरारिष्टवीरा जुह्वाम ते हविः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.114.3

O wish-fulfilling tree (Mīḍhvah)! O terror of the enemies! May we obtain your grace through our sacrifices. You, too, protect our progeny and bestow happiness on them. Seeing our children happy we shall glorify you further.

Harmony

EDITORIAL

Can we create something out of nothing? 'No,' you will say. We generally do not believe that something can come out of nothing. We call experiments of bringing out something out of nothing as either magic or miracle-mongering. We do not believe that a rose can be created out of nothing. We do not believe that a plant can sprout out of nothing—without a seed, without a cutting. The reason is, we are convinced that this goes against the very nature of things. However, a big group does not think so.

Cause and Effect are Complementary

The question whether or not something can come out of nothing is a serious and old one. In India, since thousands of years, the debate is going on about this issue. A group of Buddhists hold that 'nothing' is the source of everything. They say that a tree does not come out of a seed as it is generally believed; for, it grows *after* the seed is destroyed. There is nothing that can be called the source (*upādāna*) of something. You cannot call the seed to be the source of the tree, they argue. This theory is called *asad-vāda*. The *asad-vādins* are those who believe that 'nothing' (*abhāva*) is the source of 'something' (*bhāva*).

An exactly opposite view is held by the great scientists of India—the Sāṃkhyans and the Yogis. They ask, 'How can "nothing" be the cause of "something"? "Something" alone should be the cause of something else. When a plant is born, no doubt the seed gets destroyed and then the plant germinates; but the essence of the seed was there. Hence, it is not the seed's destruction that brings forth the plant; rather, it is its transformation.' The seed is transformed into the plant. Thus, one thing undergoes a change, a mutation, or a transformation (*vikāra* or *pariṇāma*) and becomes another. This idea of the Sāṃkhyans is called

vikāra-vāda or *pariṇāma-vāda*.

We know that milk turns into curd. When this happens, it is not that the curd comes out of nothing: it is merely a transformation (*pariṇāma*) of milk. Where did the curd come from, if it could not have been created out of nothing? It must have certainly been there in the milk already. Thus milk is the source (*dharmī*) and curd is the product (*dharma*). In other words, milk is the cause (*kāraṇa*) and curd is the effect (*kārya*). This is the fundamental principle of Sāṃkhyan evolution theory: without a cause there can be no effect. Cause and effect are complementary. A piece of gold is the raw material for an ornament, and the ornament is the end product. A few threads go to make a cloth. A lump of clay causes a pot. Just as an image was already there in a stone and the sculptor only chiselled out unwanted matter, so also every effect is already inherent in the cause (*kāraṇe kāryam sat*). The ornament was already there in the golden piece; the pot was already there in the clay; the cloth was already there in the threads. This is because 'something' cannot come out of 'nothing'. The effect (*kārya* or *dharma*) should be there in the cause (*kāraṇa* or *dharmī*). This theory is called the *satkārya-vāda*. This was the grandest contribution of Sāṃkhyā-Yoga to humanity.

Some other philosophical schools sternly oppose the Sāṃkhyans. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, for instance, upholds *asatkārya-vāda*, which says that the effect is never there in the cause. Like the Buddhists to some extent, they say that 'nothing' is the source of 'something'. But they can never give an instance to prove their theory. Ramanuja accepted *pariṇāma-vāda*, but added that it was the transformation of Brahman and not something else. The Advaitins, on the other hand,

believe in neither *satkārya* nor *asatkārya* but propound the theory of *vivarta-vāda*. A funny verse puts all this beautifully: 'To see something as something else is called *vikāra*; but to see nothing as something is called *vivarta*.'¹

Unfortunately, though *satkārya-vāda* is one of the most scientific theories, it has not been given its due. Apart from its philosophical implications in Sāṃkhya-Yoga, it has not been applied to other areas. This theory can be applied to various fields successfully. We are attempting one such in this article.

Never the Twain Shall Meet

We pointed out that the effect is already present in the cause—a cloth is already there in the threads; and a pot is already there in the clay. In that case, what is the need of considering the effect separately at all? What is the reason for having two stages—a cause-stage and an effect-stage? The reason is, though the effect may be already there in the cause, its manifestation is necessary, and that is why another stage called effect is taken into account. The basic elements in the effect and the cause, however, are the same, though manifestations are different.

We can deduce two laws from what was said above:

- a. Every effect must have a cause; and,
- b. An effect is inherent in its cause.

An important question comes up now: Can one cause give rise to another effect? Can you prepare a cloth from a lump of clay? Can you make a pot out of threads? This, of course, can never happen. Otherwise, a hen could give birth to elephants! We therefore have one more law:

- c. Every cause has its own effect, and vice versa.

What does this show? Mimicking Rudyard Kipling's words in the *Ballad of East and West*, we should say, 'Thread is thread and mud is mud and never the twain shall meet.' The direct fallout of this is that *there are differences*

in this world. We always assert that there is oneness. But from the evolution theory of *satkārya-vāda* it appears that there are differences.

The Case of World Religions

It was all right if differences were there only in things like pots and threads. But, as we shall soon see, even in the case of religions there appear to be differences, considering them from the *satkārya-vāda* viewpoint. Though, very strictly speaking, such a cause-effect relationship is not possible in the case of religions, yet for argument's sake we can assume this. Let us consider the examples of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. Using the terminology of *satkārya-vāda*, these religions can be called 'effects' (*kārya* or *dharma*) of some 'causes' (*kāraṇa* or *dharmī*). What are the causes (or sources)? These religions were not born of themselves—from 'nothing'. The Vedas, Jesus Christ, the Buddha, and Prophet Muhammad, respectively, are the sources of these religions. Thus our law (a), that every effect must have a cause, stands proved. Now, there can be no Christianity without Christ, no Buddhism without the Buddha, and no Islam without Prophet Muhammad. The world's great religions are inseparably wound round their propounders or sources. Secondly, if these religions were to have some sources, the religions must have been inherent in their respective sources. What was not there could not have been created. Thus, we can also say that the law (b), that the effect is inherent in the cause, is proved. Now, the law (c) is vital. Can Jesus Christ be called the propounder of Islam or Hinduism? Can Prophet Muhammad be called the originator of Christianity? God forbid, no. So our law, that every cause has its own effect and vice versa, is also proved. In proving this, we have committed a great miscalculation: *we have agreed that there are differences between religions!*

We Weigh for the Joy of It

From what we discussed until now, we have to admit that there are differences both

1. *Satattvato'nyathā prathā vikāra ityudīritah;*
Atattvato'nyathā prathā vivarta ityudīritah.

in creation and in religion. This is according to our fundamental agreement: we have decided that something cannot be created out of nothing. So we shall have to admit differences. However, differences have no place according to all spiritual teachers, specially Sri Ramakrishna. He not only showed through his life that there were no differences between religions but also showed that everything that we see is one. We shall have to, therefore, endeavour to show that differences are non-existent.

For a moment, let us to revert back to our old examples of pot, clay, gold, and ornament. Suppose you have a weighing machine and you wish to weigh things. You are not at all interested as to which one is the cause and which one is the effect. You do not care to know if a piece of gold gives rise to a clay-pot, or a lump of clay turns out to be a golden chain. You are keen only on measuring weights. You want to weigh each item for the joy of it. Considering that *nothing* is added or subtracted from the *kāraṇa* when it becomes the *kārya*, you can weigh a number of items for the joy of it. You will find that the weights of the lump of clay and the pot it becomes are the same. You may find that the piece of gold and its product, the chain, weigh the same. You may find that threads and the piece of cloth they become weigh the same. But you are happy that you could weigh clay and gold, cloth and ornament, threads and pot. Whatever the material, your purpose was weighing and you were fabulously successful in it.

A postscript to weighing. Is there anything on earth which gives a negative weight? Is there anything weighing -10 grams, for example? No, that cannot be. All weights—cloth, threads, mud, stone, gold, mountain—are essentially positive.

We Know for the Joy of It

We had concluded above that there are differences amongst various religions, since their proponents are different. Now suppose you are a student. You want to know what

each religion contains. You do not care which religion is good or which one is bad; you do not care for their differences either. Incidentally, this type of knowing religions is called the phenomenological view: without bias, without prejudice, you just want to know. You are just interested to know religions and prophets. You will be supremely contented when you know the Vedas and Hinduism, Christ and Christianity, Prophet Muhammad and Islam, the Buddha and Buddhism. When it comes to *knowing* (like weighing above), whatever the religion or its proponent, all are one and the same: they are sources of your knowledge. You have no religion which is not a source of knowledge. You merely wanted to know them objectively, for the joy of knowing them, and you were mightily successful.

A postscript to knowing. Is there any religion or prophet or sacred work in this world which teaches falsehood? If so, it is no religion or prophet or sacred book at all. Religions, like their sources or prophets, teach only truths to humanity. Or else, their very purpose is defeated. So, whatever their source and whatever the product, all religions, prophets and sacred books are one: they are sources of knowledge, and all teach you only the truth.

Ramakrishna's Practice of Religions

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was asked whether Sri Ramakrishna's purpose was to teach religious harmony. She replied: 'I tell you, my son, it never occurred to me that he practised all the religions with the express *motive* of preaching the idea of spiritual harmony. He...tasted God's disports in diverse ways. ... But what you should note, my dear, is that *renunciation* is his special message in this age.'² When the world is busy fighting over the question of supremacy of each religion, Holy Mother's words that Sri Ramakrishna's *main* purpose was not to preach

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1969), p. 463.

religious harmony may make harmony-enthusiasts slightly uneasy: they would have wished her to assert that Sri Ramakrishna came for religious harmony alone. But from what we said above, it is clear that Mother was right. Her words are vital and most important. What is their importance? It is important to know that Sri Ramakrishna's approach to various religions was phenomenological. There are three ways of making a comparative study of religions: exclusivistic (to exclude others from my own), inclusivistic (to call my religion perfect and compare others with mine), and pluralistic (knowing all religions objectively). Exclusivism is bad. But we should not approach religions inclusivistically either—that is, by considering one religion as ours and comparing it with others. What is the best course then? Sri Ramakrishna's phenomenological approach, the pluralistic method, is ideal, and that is the ideal for future generations. For him, all religions were different manifestations of the one Truth, and he followed all of them with *equal* respect and faith. He did not compare one with another. He just wanted to know each religion and was successful in knowing their truths. Should we not approach various religions objectively, through the gate of just knowing them for knowing's sake, giving up all preconceived notions? If we do not do so, are we really practising religious harmony?

The End is One

We have not tackled the question of differences still. We said that a particular cause leads to a particular effect only: a pot is the effect (*kārya*) of a lump of clay which is its cause (*kāraṇa* or *upādāna*); never can it be the effect of cloth. How to solve this problem?

The first method is to know the reason behind the manifestation of effect from its cause. For what reason are all these effects taking place? What is their end and purpose? When you manufacture a pot or a cloth, what is it meant for? All products are for use, generally by human beings. It may be a cloth, a pot or an ornament, but the purpose of all

these is served when they are put to use. They get annihilated in the end due to the effects of time. The main point here is, all these permutations or effects are for others' sake (*saṃghāta parārthatvāt*). A pot or a cloth is not meant for its own use; no one has ever seen an ornament adorning itself. They are all meant for others' sake. Either we see and enjoy them, or use them till they wear out.

Similar is the case with religions. Whatever their origins, religions are never meant to be for themselves—for their own use—or to remain in cold storage. If religions were meant only to remain in books or theories, they would be as good as not being there. So they are for human use. What is their end? Ultimacy is their end. All religions teach the ultimate goal of human beings. The supreme end of religion is reached when the highest that religions teach is attained by people. The goal of all religions is making human beings attain what they (religions) teach. The efforts of sages and prophets who discovered and gave these truths to the world will be fruitful only when what they taught is made practical in human lives. Thus, the end of all religions is one and the same.

In the Beginning was the Word

The fundamental problem of differences still remains unanswered. Though their ends may be the same, there are differences in religions since their sources are different from what we said above: Jesus cannot be the prophet of Islam, while Prophet Muhammad cannot be the prophet of Christianity. How does *satkārya-vāda* solve this basic problem?

Thus, we are ultimately led to one more fundamental question in the grand Sāṃkhyan theory. What is the cause of the cause? If gold undergoes change to become a ring, if a lump of clay is transformed into a pot, what gave rise to gold and clay themselves? And going backwards still, what is the cause of the cause of the cause? Here is where Sāṃkhyans prove their ingenuity. They say that there is one source, the ultimate one, called *mūla-prakṛti*. It is the final source out of which

everything has come. Now we cannot enquire about the origin of *mūla-prakṛti*; we shall have to end somewhere. Otherwise, there will be a difficulty called the problem of non-existence (*anavasthā-doṣa*). The very name *prakṛti* indicates that it is not a transformation of anything; it is not born of anything. It is the ultimate source. This *mūla-prakṛti* is *avikṛti*, unchanged, or is not a product of anything. Amongst its products, some are merely secondary sources (*prakṛtis*), some are merely transformations (*vikṛtis*), and some are both (*prakṛti-vikṛtis*). Though as sources or *kāraṇas* clay, threads, golden piece, etc are different from one another, their ultimate source is the same. These and an infinite number of other causes and effects have originated from a single source. So, originally, everything was one and there was no difference at all.

Coming to religions, we saw that Christ, Prophet Muhammad, the Buddha—all are different from one another; and one prophet cannot be called the propounder of another's religion. But who is the source of all these prophets? It is the supreme Godhead. Can there be two or three supreme Gods? No, there cannot be. There is only one supreme Being, or supreme God. It is just like saying, 'The greatest can only be one.' The fundamental tenet of Islam is that Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet. The basic mistake ignorant people make, say the Muslims, is to call Prophet Muhammad God. Similarly, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Vedas are eternal and came out of the experience of sages who experienced the one supreme Being. About the Buddha, too, it is said that he was an *arhat* and that all can attain to Buddhahood. So, though prophets and the religions they propounded were different superficially, they are all one since the supreme source is one. This leads us to view each religion as a part of a whole: there is a universal religion since there is one God and each prophet and sage showed one particular angle of it. The totality of all these religions leads to the ideal of universal religion.

Secondly, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, all say that there was the Word in the beginning out of which they have originated. So, the source of all religions is one and *there is no difference at all*.

What About the Present?

According to the grand theory of *sat-kārya-vāda* then, there was no difference in the beginning, nor is there any in the end. Speaking in material terms, in the beginning there was one *prakṛti* alone. *Prakṛti* became many in *puruṣa's* presence, and so we see multiplicity. In the end, there will be one *prakṛti* once again. Now, if it is *prakṛti* itself that has become all this in spite of apparent differences, the basic *upādāna* or material is only one. Every subsidiary element has *mūla-prakṛti* alone in it. Since everything is an evolute of the one *prakṛti*, every little thing has *prakṛti* itself in it. We see variety because we are not trained to see unity. Though we may not see it, it is the one *prakṛti* which is seen as many. Even speaking in terms of Advaita, it is all Brahman, which is mistakenly seen as many. So, where are differences?

You must have seen a child holding a long piece of thread in both hands and twirling it. During the twirling, it appears as though a big loop has been formed and that you see many threads in the centre. When the child stops twirling, the thread is again one. Sri Gaudapada says in his *Māndūkya Kārikā* (2.6): 'That which is not there in the beginning and the end is also absent now; *ādau ante ca yat nāsti, vartamāne api tat tathā*.'

We saw that the end of all religions is one; we also saw that the source of all religions is one. There was no difference in the beginning, there will be no difference in the end. So, the difference, if at all there is, should be in the present time. How big is the present time? How big is the gap between the 'middle portion' and the ends? It is a well-known fact that the present is only a moment long. Again, it is relative. It depends on how long we decide to live on this earth. Can we decide how long we wish to live, when we do not even

know what will happen the next moment? Knowing fully well that the end may come any moment, that we may die any moment, that there may be mass destruction any moment, we should never assume we are safe, and that the 'present' will stretch on endlessly. So, the superficial or apparent differences in religion, or in any other field for that matter, is only a matter of moments. Should we, knowing the one source and one end of religions, fight over differences then?

There is a Promise

Finally, there is a promise. We began by saying that we do not believe that 'something' cannot be created out of 'nothing'. We said that some material source is the basis for something else to be manufactured. This is called *upādāna-niyama*, the rule of the material. Without a material, you cannot produce anything. But there is a hope, and the hope is from Sāṃkhya-Yoga itself! The yogis assert that though not from 'nothing', something can indeed come out of something else, as we have discussed all through. But this is not altogether magic. There is a science behind it,

which is also a part of *satkārya-vāda*. The whole of creation is *prakṛti* itself in myriad forms, as we saw earlier. To a master yogi, the whole of *prakṛti* is open. We deal with a limited *prakṛti*, a few seen objects only, with our limited resources. A yogi, however, has conquered *prakṛti* and everything is open to him. The whole of *prakṛti* is open to him. He can use anything to make anything. The *Yoga Sūtras* has a separate chapter, called 'Vibhūti Pāda', devoted to this knowledge.

However, seeing the evanescence of all that we see around, knowing that the present is a matter of a moment only, should we go after such things? The Sāṃkhyans compare *prakṛti* to a dancer, dancing to please *puruṣa*. The entire game of *prakṛti* is meant for someone else (*parārthatvāt*). And that someone else is *puruṣa*. Everything other than *puruṣa* is false. The goal is to free *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*'s hold. To be free from *prakṛti* is to attain *kaivalya* or eternal happiness. That is what all religions teach in different languages. And that is the goal. □

Martyr to the Cause

Christmas, 1914; San Francisco. Swami Trigunatitananda had conducted an uninterrupted 15-hour-long service. Three days later, while he was delivering a talk, a mentally deranged fellow by name Louis Vavara came towards him. This fellow was not unknown there as he had been helped by the monk on many occasions. Everyone thought Vavara would occupy the front seat. But he opened a packet and struck what he had in his hands thrice on the dias. There was a tremendous explosion. Swami Trigunatita was severely hurt and the monastery badly damaged. Even as this painful news hit the stands, Trigunatita gave his final message from his hospital bed: 'I do not know why he did it, unless it is that he was crazy. I have known the man for several years. ... He did not take a seat up front, but came up to where I was standing. The next thing I knew there was a blinding light and a deafening noise. ... I have just been told that the man is dead, and I am sorry. It is too bad that he could not have lived, for death under such circumstances is terrible. I do not harbour any ill-will against the man. Please make that plain.' The Swami himself succumbed to injuries a few days later, on 10 January 1915.

—retold from *Swami Trigunatita: His Life and Work*

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

A Great Lady

Aurangzeb had invaded Rupangadh. Sardar Chundavat was ready to fight his enemy, but one thing troubled him: he had married very recently and was worried about his dear wife. Who knew what would happen in the war? Maybe he might not return. What would happen to his young wife then? Would she give herself away to the enemy, or remain faithful till her end? Seeing her husband hesitant, the pious lady repeatedly questioned why he was still not ready to proceed. When she came to know the reason, she replied, 'My Lord, please go to the battlefield without fear. I shall never betray you. A Rajput wife does not know anything other than considering her husband as God.' The Sardar left, but still he had doubts. He sent a messenger to his wife, saying that she should not forget her dharma after he died. The wife took this very seriously. She was worried that her husband, concerned that he was about her, might even return from the battlefield, which was a great disgrace. She told the messenger: 'Go and give my husband what I shall give you presently, and tell him I shall go ahead of him to heaven to be ready to serve him there.' So saying, she drew the unprepared messenger's sword, beheaded herself in a flash, and somehow managed to hand it over to the stunned messenger! (Cf. *Kalyan* [Hindi], 'Nari Ank'.)

Women in Administration

A remarkable feature of the Chalukya administration (11th century CE) was the powers women wielded. In a complex system of administration where the kingdom was divided into various districts and sub-districts, several women held charge of groups of districts numbering up to 12,000. These governesses had a *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* under them, and they discharged their duties with great dexterity. Their powers ranged from land and revenue to judiciary. A Chalukya princess, Akkadevi, ruled over 70 districts first, and then 140, and later 12,000! The wives of governors also had high official status (cf. *The Struggle for Empire*, ed. R.C. Mazumdar, p. 280).

A Student of India said...

We quote the great student of India, E.B. Havell (*A Study of Indo-Aryan Civilisation*, p. xxv): 'A bare recital of the historical fallacies which form the basis of European histories of India would fill a large volume, and the omission of essential facts another one. Perhaps one illustration will be sufficient. In the Session of 1913 the Under Secretary of State for India [Montagu], when presenting the Indian Budget to Parliament, explained that the chief difficulty of British government in India lay in the fact that the great mass of the people "still lived in the fifth century A.D." But Indian culture was the inspiration of the civilised world then! ... An impartial historian might well consider that the greatest triumph of British administration would be to restore to India all that she enjoyed in the fifth century A.D.'

On Conversion, Real Teachers, etc

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, would tour various countries every year to spread the eternal message of Vedanta. During one such visit in 1982 to Chicago, USA, a group of admirers interviewed him. These questions and answers were taped and transcribed, and Revered Maharaj edited them before approving them all for publication.

Question: *To perform one's duty even if it be humble, rather than another's, is great. To die in one's duty is life, to live in another's is death. What I often wonder is, can a westerner really be a Hindu? Within the Vedantic philosophy, is conversion by the westerner to Hinduism really possible?*

Swamiji: This question can be answered from two points of view. Normally, all these thousands of years there was little or no conversion to Hinduism. The name 'Hinduism' itself did not exist until the Mughal period in the 17th century CE. It was known as *sanātana dharma* or eternal religion. Hinduism grew without any kind of conversions. Today, however, there are several Hindu agencies in India which try to convert people who are willing to become Hindu from a non-Hindu faith. The Ramakrishna Order does not do so, only because we believe that all religions are true, and all paths can take you to the highest goal. But, if anybody says 'I am a Hindu' we just recognise it and deal with that person from that point of view. There is no ceremony, there is no kind of baptism for such people. They just say, 'We admire Hinduism and follow it.' There is nothing more about it. People say, 'We are Hindus' and they adopt the Hindu cultural and spiritual ways, just like people in Southeast Asia and other countries. We treat a person as a Hindu if he or she says, 'I am a Hindu.' That is so far as our Ramakrishna Order is concerned. There are some Hindu agencies which are re-converting those who are willing to come back to Hindu-

ism. Many had gone out of Hinduism due to various attractions, especially monetary. Many poor Hindu people had been taken away, especially by Christian denominations. Hinduism, therefore, is changing its policy, only because it is being attacked by various missionary religions in the modern period and that is acting as a sinister bar to harmony within the Indian subcontinent. Therefore new movements have come up, seeking to start this kind of re-conversion of those who had been taken away, but this only through persuasion. And they come back with no offering of monetary incentives.

That is the state of Hindu conversion today. Actually, the word 'Hindu' has little meaning, particularly because it is not given by the Hindus themselves; and it is not mentioned in any of the Hindu scriptures. It came accidentally; first it was only a name connected with territory. Everybody who was on the eastern side of the Indus river was called a Hindu by the Persians. In fact, when I went to Spain, they said to me, 'Do not use the word Indian; to us, Indian means the Red Indian. Call yourself Hindu. We understand Hindus—Muslims, Christians, all as Hindus.' Up to about 100 years ago, our country was known as Hindustan, even by Muslim rulers; because 'Hindu' referred to a territory. Hindus called their religion not Hinduism or by any other name, but *sanātana dharma*, eternal religion, which contains many religions federated together by a common spiritual bond.

That is the nature of the Hindu religion.

All the world's religions can be brought together under a common bond which the Vedanta provides, so that each has its own freedom; that is India's approach to religion all through the ages. But, owing to pressure from highly missionarizing religions which adopt all sorts of methods to convert India's poorer sections for politically strengthening their own base, modern India had to throw up certain movements which started converting people back to Hinduism, because till now it had only a door to go out, and no door to enter in. That was found to be dangerous in this modern period. It would change the character of India itself. Hinduism provides freedom, tremendous freedom, to every community. Suppose any one of those converting religions become strong and dominant, then that old India will die, that liberal atmosphere will die, because that is not found in any other religion. This attitude is in no other country—this acceptance, this tolerance, this respect for every religion. This progressive Hindu attitude will be destroyed in India, and no other religion can take its unique place. That ancient India will die and nobody would like that. The world will be poorer thereby. So, these new Hindu movements are taking in people who have gone out, but that also, only by peaceful methods of persuasion: 'Three generations ago, you were all Hindus. If you find this is beautiful, you can come.' So many people tell me that they are doing this kind of work. That is what is happening just now on the subject of conversion to Hinduism in India.

Question: You mentioned that because of certain religious activities in India, people face some obstacles and hindrances in communicating with each other. I assume that you are speaking of religious representatives who attempt to convert the Hindus to other forms of religion. In view of Christian mysticism in the West, particularly among the German and Spanish mystics, and their search for the highest and the idea of the disappearance of the self in the Absolute, do you see any

possibility of collaboration in this search for an authentic oneness between Christians and Hindus?

Swamiji: Tremendous possibilities are there in the modern period, because the world is really hungry for the spiritual food. But, religions generally give only stones and not bread, in the words of Jesus ('...command this stone that it be made bread' *St Luke*, 4.3). By collaboration of the spiritually minded in Christianity and Hinduism and other religions, you will find the development of this capacity to give spiritual food to people instead of 'stones' of dogmas and narrow fanatical ideas. In every religion there is the formal dogmatic dimension and there is also the elevating spiritual dimension. It is the spiritual dimension that people are seeking today. The formal is needed as a base but not as the final blessing of religion. In that way, the Hindu religion alone makes a clear distinction between the formal and the spiritual sides of religion, and stresses the dominance of the spiritual side. That is a special quality of the Hindu religion. The person who deals only with the formal side is treated as very ordinary—just like a priest, for example. This class is not highly respected. But a man of God—the man or woman who has actually realized God—is highly respected in India. So, a Christian or a Muslim who lives the spiritual life will be highly respected in India. This is the nature of the Hindu tradition. This tradition has tremendous significance for the rest of the world as well. Wherever there is spirituality, you do not look to its label; spirituality has no label. There is no Hindu spirituality or Christian spirituality, though the basis may be Hindu or Christian. So, when one becomes actually spiritual, one goes beyond these distinctions of creed, sect, and denomination so that a highly spiritual Christian will be honoured by everyone, because he or she has achieved something which we are all seeking. It is there that you find universality of spiritual experience; and there you can have a tremendous collaboration. Col-

laboration at the lower level is practically impossible because of the prominence of all these ethnical dimensions of religion. They are after conversion, they are after increasing their political numbers. That conversion has no meaning in spiritual life. I can say, 'I am a wicked man, I change my religion.' What do I become? My wickedness has not gone, only my place has been changed from one census column to another census column. That is all that has happened; whereas, if change of whole character takes place by conversion, that is beautiful. That was the original meaning of conversion.

When I read the famous book, *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, I found the truth of the real meaning of conversion. This intellectual of the fourth century CE, given to drunkenness and every form of vice, but highly intellectual, was struggling for some time to become spiritual. He could not overcome these weaknesses. His mother, Monica, was praying for him, and one day the miracle of conversion took place. What was the nature of that conversion? It was a conversion from worldliness to spirituality, from worldly life to a godly life. That is the wonderful change in his life, and Augustine gives a beautiful expression to it in that famous book. He cries: 'O Lord! How long am I to wait for this change? How long? How long? Tomorrow? Why not today? Why not now? Why not this very hour see the end of my wretchedness?' That was the prayer that came from his heart and that very moment he became converted into a soul seeking God. So, this type of conversion is really worthwhile. It is a vertical movement, whereas the other is a lateral movement—changing people's religion from this to that without any change in their character, in their outlook.

This kind of collaboration at the spiritual level is not only possible but absolutely necessary for the good of humankind today. The world seeks spiritual food. It is there in Christianity, in Hinduism, in Judaism and in Islam. There is a big fund of spirituality in all these

various traditions. Every tradition has produced great saints and sages. So, a pooling up of resources for use in the highly materialistic age in which we are living is the right thing in this modern period. This work has tremendous possibility and Sri Ramakrishna's advent in the modern age makes this type of collaboration at a higher level possible. He was the very embodiment of harmony.

Question: I would like to know if you could help the Americans find out the difference between a real swami and a fake swami. There are so many of them coming to USA and you could tell us some points on how we could find out who is who.

Swamiji: This is a problem seen everywhere—in India also. Even there also numerous types of teachers go around. There is one criterion given about a spiritual teacher in our spiritual tradition. First, he or she must be pure, a good student of spiritual life, and must have practised it. Second, he or she must have unselfish love for the disciples who come to him or her. And lastly, he or she should not sell religion. Selling religion is condemned in all our sacred books; for religion is too sacred. That is what has been emphasized all through India's religious history. The teacher gives religious instruction to somebody out of compassion, out of love. If he or she sells it, religion is destroyed thereby. So, I can only tell the people here—beware of people who sell religion and who make big promises like, 'You will achieve spiritual experiences quickly.' There is no instant success in religion; you have to go slowly and steadily. So, people here are to be told that religion is not so cheap. You cannot get salvation in three months; it cannot be given in a capsule. All these ideas people must know. Spiritual life is a serious struggle. You have the Divine hidden within you; you have to struggle to realize it. So, when this knowledge comes to people, I do not think cheap gurus will be able to spoil anybody's mind.

Even in India, many people do not know what religion is. So one who promises quick

spiritual results gets disciples more easily than others. It is like a political party promising everything under the sun 'if you elect me.' Similarly, people are cheated in the name of religion also. People themselves must shoulder some responsibility; they should know that religion is not so cheap, that it is a serious matter. They must think thrice before they accept a guru. Search for guru is not religion; search for God is religion. Here, Sri Ramakrishna's advice is very significant. He said, 'Observe a Sadhu in daytime as well as at night, and believe him then only' (*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, p. 906).

Question: *In some traditions, you are supposed to worship the guru as God. Is that enjoined in your tradition also?*

Swamiji: There is a general teaching that God comes to you in the form of a guru, because the real guru is God Himself. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, 'It is Satchidānanda that comes to us in the form of the guru. ... The guru should be regarded as the divine

manifestation of God' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 292). But, that guru comes to you through this particular guru, as a human being. So, we treat this human guru as a symbol of that supreme Guru. This is necessary for spiritual progress. That is all that it means, not making a cult of it. The main object of worship is God Himself, not the guru. The guru points out, 'This is your path, that is your ideal,' and blesses the disciple. Sri Ramakrishna says, '...the guru appears before the aspirant and says to him, "Behold! There is your Ishta." Saying this, the guru merges in the Ishta. He who is the guru is also the Ishta' (*Gospel*, p. 184). This is the guru's work. Because he has done this help, we thank him, we worship him, we honour him; that is the idea. In all mystical traditions—in Sufi and Christian mysticism also—the guru, who puts a person on the spiritual path, is highly respected. In Buddhism and Jainism also the guru is highly respected. □

To those who do not believe in God

Two western ladies, who believed in humanitarian service but not in God, came to Swami Adbhutanandaji. He asked them, 'Why should you do good to others? If you do not believe in the existence of God, there will always remain a flaw in your argument. Humanitarian work is a matter that concerns the good of society. You cannot prove that it will do good to yourself. So after a time you will get tired of doing the work that does not serve your self-interest. On the contrary, if you believe in God there will be a perennial source of interest, for the same God resides in others as in you.' One of the ladies asked, 'But can you prove that the one God resides in many?' 'Why not?' answered the Swami, and added, 'But it is a subjective experience. Love cannot be explained to another. The same is the case with God.' One of them asked, 'How can it be possible that I am the Soul, I being finite and the Soul being infinite?' 'Where is the difficulty?' replied Adbhutanandaji, 'Have you not seen jasmine flowers? The petals of those flowers are very small. But even those petals, dew falling on them, reflect the infinite sky. Do they not? In the same way through the grace of God this limited self can reflect the Infinite.'

—retold from *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna*

Vedanta in America

Where We've Been and Where We Are

PRAVRAJIKA VRAJAPRANA

A remarkable study of Vedanta's history in America gives the theme its due. A nun at the Sarada Convent, Santa Barbara, USA, Pravrajika Vrajaprana has written and edited several important books and has numerous brilliant articles to her credit. Her latest work, Vedanta: A Simple Introduction, is a beautiful book of 90 pages.

'In order to promote the kingdom,' writes Paul Knitter—a former Divine Word missionary and current professor of theology at an American Catholic university—'Christians must witness to Christ. All peoples, all religions, must know him in order to grasp the full content of God's presence in history.... But in the new ecclesiology and in the new model for truth, one admits also that all peoples should know of Buddha, of Muhammad, of Krishna.'¹

Welcome to America as she stares down the face of the new millennium and welcome to an America whose religious face has been profoundly transformed in recent years.

Even thirty years ago it would have been inconceivable for a Christian missionary—speaking from his own experience—to say, 'It can be said that the goal of missionary work is being achieved when announcing the gospel to all peoples makes the Christian a better Christian and the Buddhist a better Buddhist.'²

While the words bear an unmistakable Vedantic ring, having them intoned by a Christian missionary and theologian is nothing less than astonishing. It is here, in the realm of attitudes and ideas, that we can see

Vedanta's transformative effect on America most clearly, for it is not an exaggeration to assert that the Vedanta movement has played a significant role in the transfiguration of the American landscape. This transformation is all the more remarkable considering how small the Vedanta movement is when compared to other religious movements in the West.

Were we to assess Vedanta's impact on the West by looking for large numbers attending Vedanta Societies, we would certainly be disappointed. Yet before we succumb to hand wringing over numbers, let us remember that Swami Vivekananda's mission in the West was to spread ideas, not churches. In this mission—the spreading of ideas and the changing of attitudes—the Vedanta movement has succeeded quite well. Though our numbers are small, the impact of Vedanta on America has unquestionably been pronounced. Concerning the Vedanta movement in the West, American historian Carl Jackson wrote: 'Few other religious bodies of such Lilliputian size have equated the movement's impact or historical significance.'³

How did this happen? Through the dissemination of ideas via the world's intelli-

1. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (New York: Orbis, 1985), p. 222.

2. Ibid.

3. Carl Jackson, *Vedanta for the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 108.

gentsia.

While Eastern ideas had already appeared on Western shores via Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and other Transcendentalists, the rivulet of Eastern thought became a robust river only with the arrival of Swami Vivekananda in 1893. The Vedanta philosophy which had been exposed only to the select few suddenly became available to a much larger audience.

Swamiji travelled widely and spoke frequently; his talks were widely reported and avidly discussed in all segments of the population. He managed to be both a philosophical topic and a trendy news fad. After Swamiji left the country, interested students formed groups which continued to study and practise Vedanta. Yet these groups had much less influence on society than the social and intellectual lions of the day; it was *their* interest that continued to spread Vedanta's influence far and wide long after Swamiji's American sojourn had ended.

A look at Josephine MacLeod, connoisseur of the elect, provides us with a fascinating example of how the Vedanta ball kept rolling in the West. A true world citizen, Josephine MacLeod's sole ambition was to spread Swamiji's message wherever she went. Her *modus operandi* was to collect influential people and feed them Swamiji's ideas, peppered with her own infectious enthusiasm. Swami Vivekananda himself told her, 'It is for this work Swamiji has left you still in the world—and making you scour round the world in search of great men.'⁴

Romain Rolland was one such trophy. Considered the greatest living French writer of his day, Rolland won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1915. Interestingly, it was via another one of Josephine MacLeod's trophies—Dhan Gopal Mukherji—that Rolland became interested in Ramakrishna. Meeting

Mukherji in America, Josephine MacLeod inspired him to write about Sri Ramakrishna, pouring into him her wealth of knowledge and zeal. The direct consequence of her efforts was Mukherji's book on Sri Ramakrishna, *The Face of Silence*, which was chosen by the League of Nations as one of the best forty books of 1926 and was also selected for the International Library of Geneva.

Discovering Sri Ramakrishna via Mukherji, Romain Rolland became fascinated by Mukherji's subject. Rolland's interest was conveyed by Mukherji to Josephine MacLeod who promptly sent Rolland books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The happy result of her blitzkrieg was the publication of *The Life of Ramakrishna* and *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*. Because of Rolland's immense stature, the books were widely read by the general public and translated into several foreign languages.

One of the people who read Rolland nearly twenty years later was the famed American author Henry Miller, who read Rolland's works while crossing the American continent. 'Now that the trip is over,' Miller wrote in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, 'I must confess that the experience which stands out most strongly in my mind is the reading of Romain Rolland's two volumes on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.'⁵

Known primarily for his steamy novels and censorship battles, one would expect Miller to be the *last* person to find inspiration in Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Yet not only was he inspired, he also ended up inspiring others by bringing Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji to the public's attention.

The Air-Conditioned Nightmare opens with a 'Citation from Swami Vivekananda,' consisting of two long quotations which absorb almost one full page. Throughout the book Miller mentions both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Referring to Sri

4. Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Tantine: The Life of Josephine MacLeod* (Calcutta: Sarada Math, 1990), p. 203.

5. Henry Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 18.

Ramakrishna as 'the very incarnation of love and wisdom,' he adds several pages later: 'I was full of Ramakrishna on leaving Pittsburgh. Ramakrishna who never criticized, who never preached, who accepted all religions, who saw God everywhere in everything: the most ecstatic being, I imagine, that ever lived.'⁶ In another portion of the book Miller quotes Romain Rolland's *Life of Swami Vivekananda* for nearly one full page and writes of Swamiji's triumph at the 1893 Parliament of Religions.⁷ In the book Miller also bemoaned the fact that Sri Ramakrishna was virtually unknown in America: 'Ramakrishna—probably not one out of a hundred thousand ever heard of that name, nor are they apt to as long as they live.'⁸ Miller's statistics are probably not far from the mark, yet today there are prominent devotees who, had it not been for their study of Henry Miller, would never have discovered Sri Ramakrishna.

Miller's pan-American trek brought him directly to Swami Prabhavananda, a man he met only once, but who 'left a great impression on my mind.'⁹ The same Swami profoundly influenced three other prominent cultural icons—Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and Gerald Heard—who themselves passed on Vedanta's ideas to countless numbers of people.

Meeting Swami Prabhavananda in Hollywood in those early years was, as Christopher Isherwood later related, 'a contact which had far-reaching effects on the lives of all three of us.'¹⁰ All three men were well-known, prominent intellectuals who wrote about the matters that interested them. Be-

cause of their intellectual standing, what interested them became a matter of interest to a large segment of the population: while not everyone can be a genius or a social luminary, there are legions of those who appreciate and follow the interests of those who are. 'The growing audience for mystical ideas...[was] further widened by the publications of well-known authors like Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher Isherwood,' American historian Hal Bridges wrote.¹¹

Huxley was, along with Heard and Isherwood, an initiated disciple of Swami Prabhavananda; again, like Heard and Isherwood, he was a regular contributor to the Southern California Vedanta journal *Vedanta and the West*. Huxley wrote thirty-one books, sixty-five stories and innumerable articles—Vedantic themes appearing in many of them. Even his novels were created as vehicles for expressing his philosophy. *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley's best-known philosophical work, was published in 1944 to critical acclaim: *The New York Times* deemed it a 'masterpiece.' For over a half-century it has continued to reach an extraordinarily wide audience, the book's appeal lying as much in its vast sweep as in its suggestion 'that the end of human life is contemplation, or the direct and intuitive awareness of God.'¹²

While Gerald Heard was celebrated in his day, today he has fallen into literary oblivion. Yet during his heyday in the 40s and 50s, he was widely read, publishing more than forty-seven volumes of writing, many of them directly connected with Vedanta. Indeed, it was Gerald Heard's direct influence that brought Dr Huston Smith to Vedanta, and it was through his guidance that Dr Smith met Swami Satprakashananda in St Louis.

An octogenarian, Dr Smith today continues to actively support Vedanta activities. In recent years he has been called both 'the

6. Ibid., p. 26; p. 31.

7. Ibid., pp. 46-8.

8. Ibid., pp. 164-5.

9. Letter of Henry Miller to Ursula Bond, 16 June 1962; archives of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

10. Hal Bridges, *American Mysticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 87.

11. Ibid., p. 74.

12. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), p. 294.

world's greatest authority on world religions' and a 'media star.' Dr Smith is probably best known as the author of *The World's Religions* (previously entitled *The Religions of Man*) which also has a separate incarnation as *The Illustrated World's Religions*. Over two million copies of the various editions have been sold since its 1958 publication; it has been translated into fourteen languages. Considered the standard by which to judge other texts on world religions, *The World's Religions* is one of the most frequently assigned books for college-level classes on religion. In every edition of this book, Sri Ramakrishna is both mentioned and quoted. In *The Religions of Man*, Smith says that Sri Ramakrishna was 'the greatest Hindu saint of the nineteenth century.'¹³

Over the years, Dr Smith has had several television series on world religions; the latest and the most popular being *The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith*, a five-part series that consisted of Bill Moyer's televised interviews with Dr Smith. One of the many satisfactions of viewing *The Wisdom of Faith* was to see a photograph of Swami Satprakashananda taking up the entire television screen while hearing Huston Smith's voice in the background speaking of how much he had gained from his association with the Swami. In the television series Smith clearly emphasized how much he had gained spiritually from the Vedanta movement in general and Swami Satprakashananda in particular. On Christmas Eve, for example, Smith and his family would attend a local Christian church for the family worship. Once home, however, Dr Smith would leave for the Vedanta Society to hear Swami Satprakashananda speak on the message of Christ. That, Smith remarked—while millions of television viewers listened—was where he got his spiritual sustenance.

It's essential to keep in mind that while only a handful of people out of the millions of

viewers would remember the name 'Swami Satprakashananda' or perhaps even 'Vedanta,' the effect of programmes such as these hasn't been so much to bring people to Vedanta's doorstep as to normalize it in the American context. Swami Vivekananda was the first and—up to this point at least—the only Vedanta bombshell; since his time the changing of the American religious outlook has been gradual and incremental. The effect of all these books, magazine articles, and television appearances has not been to bring the American masses to their local Vedanta Societies but to broaden Americans' personal outlook regarding spirituality.

Let us now turn our gaze to Hollywood: Of the Huxley-Heard-Isherwood triumvirate, it was Christopher Isherwood who was the most intimately connected with the Vedanta movement, remaining so throughout his long life. Whereas Huxley later became sidelined by promoting psychedelics for nirvana and Heard slipped into cultural obscurity, Isherwood used his considerable literary gifts to bring Vedanta to the public eye. Not only was his book *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* published by one of America's foremost publishers, Simon and Schuster, but his literary collaborations with Swami Prabhavananda—which provided elegant translations of Hinduism's basic texts—reached a vast audience.

The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita; How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali; and Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination are the best-known Prabhavananda-Isherwood collaborations. For many years each title was available in a mass-market edition by a major publisher, thus making the books widely available to the general public. 'A distinguished literary work' is how *Time* magazine characterized the Prabhavananda-Isherwood *Bhagavad-Gita* which has sold over one million copies since its 1944 publication. It is the only Prabhavananda-Isherwood title still available in the mass-market edition; today the book is still widely used as a college text

13. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 26.

and—unlike most other Vedanta books—remains available in general-audience bookstores.

In 1996, the *New York Times Book Review* created a list of the century's most influential writers; both Huxley and Isherwood were featured on that list, as was another world-famous American writer deeply influenced by Vedanta: J.D. Salinger.

Salinger brings our discussion to America's Eastern seaboard where Swami Nikhilananda was drawing New York's intellectual crème de la crème.

In the 50s Salinger gave a copy of his best-selling book *Franny and Zooey* to his mentor Swami Nikhilananda; within the book was Salinger's inscription—words to the effect that he 'was able to circulate the ideas of Vedanta only through the medium of such stories as these.'¹⁴ Salinger's later short stories are Vedanta-drenched: one story describes Swami Vivekananda as 'one of the most exciting, original, and best-equipped giants of this century.' The story's protagonist further declares: 'My personal sympathy for him will never be outgrown or exhausted as long as I live, mark my words, I would easily give ten years of my life, possibly more, if I could have shaken his hand or at least said a brisk, respectful hello to him on some busy street in Calcutta or elsewhere.'¹⁵

To continue our New York discussion, we need to backtrack into the 40s to meet the luminaries that graced Vedanta's intellectual milieu. Heinrich Zimmer, one of the century's most prominent religious philosophers, was but one of the stellar personalities attending the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center. Zimmer's interest in Indian philosophy effec-

tively changed the way that many Westerners looked upon the East. In his monumental opus, *Philosophies of India*, Sri Ramakrishna figures prominently and is frequently cited. Not only is he quoted frequently, he is quoted at length: some of Sri Ramakrishna's quotations run into several pages. By the end of the volume, one has read a significant selection of Sri Ramakrishna's words from Swami Nikhilananda's translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

It is a testament to the intellectual eminence of New York's Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center that a man of Joseph Campbell's rarefied calibre would spend several years helping Swami Nikhilananda in his translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in addition to spending years assisting him in his four-volume translation of the Upanishads. In fact, as president of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York for some years, Campbell was a pivotal figure in the Center itself.

There are few intellectual giants whose names can truly be called 'household words,' but Joseph Campbell was 'the rarest of intellectuals in American life,' K.C. Cole of *Newsweek* wrote. 'A serious thinker...embraced by the popular culture.'¹⁶ Campbell was considered the world's greatest authority on mythology and folklore, and throughout his copious writings we find Sri Ramakrishna quoted on a regular basis. On occasion the quotations are lengthy, sometimes quite brief. What is important, however, is that no reader of Joseph Campbell can escape Sri Ramakrishna. Very few twentieth-century thinkers have had the power of attraction Campbell possessed, thus making his influence more profound than those who quoted Sri Ramakrishna more often or at greater length.

It should be mentioned at least in passing that other prominent intellectuals also

14. From a lecture given by Dr Sumitra Menon in the Santa Barbara Temple, 24 February 1991, on J.D. Salinger and Vedanta.

15. 'Hapworth 16, 1924,' *The New Yorker*, 12 June 1965, p. 6. This short story later appeared in *The Complete Uncollected Short Stories of J.D. Salinger*, 2 vols., 1974.

16. *Contemporary Authors: New Revised Series*, 147 vols., ed. Thomas Walsh (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), Vol. 28, p. 93.

served to bring Vedanta's ideas into America's public domain: the historians Arnold Toynbee and Will and Ariel Durant; the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin; the great psychoanalyst and philosopher Carl Jung; the Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton. All these luminaries and others that remain unmentioned contributed to opening the American religious mind to the ideas that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda propounded. Most of the intellectuals mentioned above are now long gone though their imprint on American culture remains.

Where does that leave us today?

An obvious contrast between today and a few decades ago is that we no longer have within our ranks the social and intellectual powerhouses we once had. Sorokins and Huxleys and Campbells, sad to say, do not grow on trees. This is not to say that we lack extraordinarily intelligent, dedicated individuals whose contributions are noteworthy in various fields of endeavour. Our movement is blessed with many of a very high calibre. Yet despite their brilliance, they are not in the position of spreading ideas through the force of their prestige and personality.

America is vastly different—for good or for ill—from the country that nurtured Vedanta's earlier intellectual czars: whereas Vedanta used to be one of the few Eastern religions available in America, Vedanta is now one relatively small group in a flood of many. Since the 60s a deluge of Hindu gurus has come and gone, some leading such ignoble lives that even the word 'guru' carries a hint of the pejorative. Major news magazines routinely equate Hinduism with 'New Age' religion—that is, bereft of intellectual moorings and plain common sense. Because Hinduism was taken up ignorantly and nonchalantly by many as a 60s fad, Hindu philosophy has yet to regain its earlier intellectual standing.

Recent years have seen the meteoric rise of Buddhism, a spiritual path not associated with religious or cultural trappings, thus enabling noncommitted Christians and Jews to

maintain their traditional identity while following helpful Buddhist spiritual practices. The fact that Vedanta offers equally priceless wisdom is, unfortunately, unknown. As importantly, Buddhism has world-renowned spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh whose exemplary lives and well-publicized teachings have attracted millions of Westerners. The Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön, famed for her down-to-earth practicality and humour, has also enjoyed singular success in the West. Buddhist books, available from any bookstore anywhere in the country and published by America's largest publishers, have also spurred the growth in American Buddhism.

By contrast, while several Vedanta centres continue to publish Vedanta books and import and distribute books published by the Ramakrishna Order, the reality of today's publishing world dictates that the vast majority of these books will not reach the general public. They will be available in Vedanta bookstores in Vedanta centres for Vedanta devotees. Market-driven publishers offer what will predictably turn a profit; a little-known brand of Hindu philosophy doesn't place dollar signs in corporate eyes.

Further, today's American bookstores are dependent upon mammoth book distribution centres for their books; these distributors stock all the major publishers and most of the medium-sized ones. Small publishing houses (ie, the ones that publish Vedanta books) can ill afford the huge discounts that these mega-distributors demand.

Is Vedanta's view from America bleak then? Not at all. Vedanta's presence remains vibrant in cities where Vedanta Societies actively participate in interreligious dialogue as well as in places where they are actively participating in school, college and university outreach. Still, in a vast, highly populated country, we're only referring to approximately twenty Vedanta Societies and another small group of nonaffiliated centres.

How, then, do we spread the ideas that

were once spread by the intelligentsia? Through our continuing work with interreligious councils, through pro-active work with educational facilities, and especially through the great democratizing force of the Internet.

Can't find any Vedanta books in your local bookstore? No problem—you can find them on the Internet. And, happily, Vedanta books aren't just listed on Vedanta sites. They're on the web sites of the world's largest online booksellers: amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com, among others. Out of curiosity I booted the amazon.com site to look up Swami Shraddhananda's book *Seeing God Everywhere*. Not only was it there, it carried beneath it a glowing review:

An engaging, thought-provoking, spiritual text. This book is an especially enriching, spiritual text. Its message spans all religions and cultures, and offers thought-provoking insights. Extremely easy to read and understand, you'll find it difficult to put down. The spiritual exercises at the end of the book are especially helpful for those seeking to establish a closer relationship with God.

The review was voluntarily submitted by a person completely unknown to Vedanta; amazingly, upon inquiry I discovered that the review's author was a Catholic deacon!

While bookstore sales of Vedanta books are not what they were in previous years, our online sales have grown tremendously. There's no doubt that this trend will only increase.

No Vedanta centre within 1000 miles of

your home? Not to worry: there are Vedanta sites online which will provide not only fine reading material but also a forum where people can submit questions to monastics. One recent inquiry from South Carolina is as follows:

At church we're studying Swami Prabhavananda's *The Eternal Companion*...the term 'discrimination' confuses us. What exactly does it mean? Does it mean discernment between those things that lead to self-realization and those that don't?

To have a Vedanta book studied in a Christian church in a conservative state like South Carolina is enough to make one's head spin. But this e-mail in itself tells what progress Vedanta has made in this country.

There are numerous Internet inquiries requesting information on the Vedanta centre closest to the person's home and also requests for more information on Vedanta literature. All in all, the information revolution has had an extremely positive effect in bringing Vedanta's message to a wider audience.

This only goes to show that where there's a will there's a way—particularly where God is concerned! We've always heard that the Lord does his own work; today the work is progressing in ways that would have been inconceivable to us mortals even a decade ago.

The future, then, seems to bode well. As long as we remain true to Sri Ramakrishna and the ideals he upheld, all we have to do is perform our work as best as we can. The rest, as we can see, the Lord will take care of in his own way and in his own time. □

Our usual problem with meditation

A western admirer asked Swami Trigunatitananda: 'Swami, how can one meditate regularly? I sit to meditate, and the door-bell rings; then the telephone rings; and the fleas crawl and bite!' Smiling kindly, Swami replied: 'Yes, these things do come to disturb. But try to find some time in the day when you will be free from outside calls, or can ignore them. Then if fleas come, try to get hold of the mind. It is all in the mind. Catch the fleas in the mind!'

Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta - III

DR ALAN HUNTER

(continued from the December 1999 issue)

Esoteric Schools

Psycho-physiological phenomena such as psychic powers, inner heat, the 'kundalini', energy-centres in the body, or trance-like states are found in various parts of the world from the start of recorded history. These phenomena are considered by some to be arcane, esoteric, delusional, or morbid; on the other hand, religious practitioners, especially in mystical traditions, have found them immensely meaningful, either in themselves, or as techniques to achieve higher goals, or as by-products of an overwhelming process of purification and transcendence.

Esoteric techniques are practised in Chinese Buddhism, which might lead one to suppose (by analogy with Buddhist doctrines) that they were first discovered in India, and transmitted thence to China. The truth of the matter seems to be more complex. Historical records are scanty, but they point to a long period of interaction between India, China, and the border areas between them like Assam and Bengal. A vast arcane lore in China dates from very early times: there are inscriptions and documents dating from around the sixth century BCE that discuss breathing and the control of inner energy in terms that suggest they were already widely practised.¹ Archaeologists have also found ancient diagrams and statuettes of men performing movements that look remarkably like the postures of Chinese yoga of later centuries. By the third century BCE, techniques of quietism

like control of breathing, diet, sex, and excitement were topics in important writings on philosophy like the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* texts. Of course, similar concerns were almost certainly prevalent in the Indus Valley and other ancient Indian civilizations.

This early period pre-dates any known historical contacts between the great civilizations of India and China. It is thought that the first trade routes, which were only very minor, opened between Burma and Southwest China in the second century BCE, with growing maritime trade over the next couple of centuries along the Indo-China coastal region, and some contacts through the Himalayas and regions to the north. How could Indian and Chinese mysticism share common features if the cultures had no contact? Some historians suggest that both derive from a common origin, probably Babylonia; however, this seems to be a theoretical speculation for which no hard evidence exists.² Another possibility advanced by the French sinologist Maspero, is that 'the facts of mysticism are the facts of psychology, facts which may not make their appearance frequently, but which do so universally.'³ In any event, well before the introduction of Buddhism or other Indian

1. Helmut Wilhelm, 'Eine Chou-Inschrift über Atemtechnik' [A Zhou Dynasty Inscription on Breath-Control] in *Monumenta Serica*, 1948, Vol. 13, p. 385.

2. See for example J. Filliozat, 'L'Inde et les Echanges Scientifiques dans l'Antiquité' [India and Scientific Exchanges in Antiquity] in *Journal of World History* (UNESCO, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 353.

3. Henri Maspero, 'Etudes Historiques' [Historical Studies] in *Mélanges Posthumes sur les Religions et l'Histoire de la Chine*, ed. Paul Demieville, (Paris, 1950); revised in *T'oung Pao* (1951), Vol. 40, p. 372.

influences, China had an indigenous, or largely indigenous, body of mystical lore.

Perhaps because of the central importance of irrigation and flood-control in China, it is interesting that the images used to describe the 'subtle body' and its energy often use metaphors from hydraulic engineering, talking of channels, circulations, currents, flows, and so on: the overall impression one gains is similar to that from the Indian texts, but the details are different. Another science that developed early in China was embryology, and that again is reflected in the metaphors used to talk about spiritual growth and fruition. Incidentally, calisthenic and breathing exercises are still extremely widespread in contemporary China, and form an important component of primary health care, preventive medicine, and rehabilitation after strokes.

After the opening of trade and diplomacy, the situation becomes more complex, and would be a fascinating area for further research. Scholars appear to agree that after the first century CE, the similarities between Chinese and Indian mysticism are 'too frequent and too striking to be merely of an incidental nature.'⁴ Joseph Needham concludes a survey of the evidence by stating that 'the resemblances between Tantrism, Hathayoga and Taoism are distinctly close; what remains (and that is not an easy matter) is to find out which most influenced the other.'⁵ As we are reminded in this citation, by the early centuries of the common era, tantrism and the forerunners of Hathayoga were gaining prominence in India: for instance the *Maitrayani* and *Yogatattva* Upan-

ishads discuss the *susumna* vessel and the kundalini. It is significant that the geographical base of tantrism was precisely in border regions of India, specifically those which had the closest contact with China: Assam and Bengal; Gandhara; and Tamil Nadu.

Historical evidence points to the intensive interaction between the two nations from about the second to the eighth centuries. There was the well-known 'brain-drain' of Indian Buddhist monks, who went to China to assist in evangelization and translation, while devout Chinese pilgrims came to India to study Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit. However, contacts between Indians and Chinese were not restricted to Buddhism, but encompassed Hinduism and Taoism. In 644, a king of Kamarupa, Bhaskara Kumara, requested a translation into Sanskrit of the key Taoist text, the *Daodejing*, which was accordingly made at the behest of the Chinese emperor himself.⁶ By the eighth century, Indian families had almost monopolized the position of astronomers at the Tang court (at that time the most powerful in the world).

As another example, around 720 Sri Navasimha Potavarman, ruler of Kanchipuram (in southern India), was in close contact with the Chinese imperial court, and even erected a temple 'devoted to China [or possibly to a Chinese deity] and asked the emperor [of China] for an inscription giving a name to it. The emperor thereupon decreed the donation of an ornamental plaque.' Later that year, an emissary from Kanchi was given a warm welcome in the Chinese capital Chang'an, and a Chinese ambassador presented a ceremonial gift to the king in Kanchi. The Indian visit to China was especially important: a member of the emissary's retinue was none

4. T. Pokora, 'An Important Crossroads of Chinese Thought (Huan Than, the First Coming of Buddhism, and Yogistic Trends in Early Taoism)' in *Archiv Orientalni* (Prague, 1961), Vol. 29, p. 64.

5. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), Vol. 5, p. 275.

6. For the full story, which occasioned a bitter dispute over terminology between different Sanskrit experts, see P. Pelliot, 'Autour d'une Traduction Sanskrite du *Tao-to-Ching*' [On the Sanskrit Translation of the *Daodejing*] in *T'oung Pao* (1912), Vol. 13, p. 350.

other than the Mahayanist monk Vajrabodhi, one of the greatest Buddhist tantric practitioners, who was to have a profound impact on religious history in China.

As a final example, the tantrism of East Bengal was deeply influenced by the Chinese. From the eighth century, Chinese, mainly Taoist, texts and techniques were introduced into the region. Tantric texts described and advocated *cinacara*, ie the religious practices then current in Great China (*Mahacina*). The goddess Mahacina-Tara, the sakti of the great Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, was worshipped. The *Mahacina-kramacara-tantra* (also known as the *Cinacara Saratantra*) tells how an Indian sage travelled to China to learn about the worship of sakti, and learned that: 'Women are the incarnations of the gods, the principle of life...a true adept must always be spiritually in the midst of them.'⁷

Later exchanges between the two countries are better documented. Religious practitioners travelled along trade routes. Java was an important centre where monks from both countries met and sometimes stayed for decades, studying Buddhism, Sanskrit, and Chinese; the interaction led to the construction of one of the great religious buildings of the world at Borobudur. Chinese military campaigns against Tibet and other Central Asian states in the Tang dynasty (618-907) created a relatively secure land route (the Silk Road) from the Chinese capital, at some periods leading as far as Lebanon on the Mediterranean; scholars took advantage of the opportunity to travel between India and China, carrying texts and completing translation projects. Among the important monks who travelled at the time were the Indians Amoghavajra (705-774), Vajrabodhi (669-741) and the Chinese Yijing (635-713). Among

their multifarious interests were mandalas, visualization techniques, mudras, and mantras. It is quite probable that Indian influence on China was greater than vice versa, but nevertheless Chinese religions were certainly known in India. Maps of Chinese pilgrimage sites (especially of the great Wutai Mountain, still a pilgrimage centre today) have been found in Central Asia, and when the Chinese monk Yijing visited India in the late seventh century, he found that people there were familiar with China.⁸

A further strand of contacts came after the rise of the Tibetan peoples and their adoption of Buddhism. Buddhist tantric monasteries flourished not only within the territory of present-day Tibet, but in vast stretches of territory to the north and west of China, a polyglot and cosmopolitan environment with intensive interaction between Tibetans, Mongols, Chinese, Central Asians, and Indians. One of the most important sakti goddesses was Syama (or Syamatara), known as far east as the Chinese capital Chang'an and recorded as early as the seventh century by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang in Bihar.⁹ By 1227 (the year of Genghis Khan's death), much of Asia was under Mongol control; in 1280 the Mongols completed their conquest of China under Kublai Khan, marking the apogee of the Mongol empire. Among other consequences, tantric Buddhism became virtually a state religion for the whole empire, in China, for example, penetrating far down into the southern and eastern coastal provinces.

To summarize this section, one can establish first that from the earliest times the Chinese had a profound interest in and knowledge of 'esoteric' meditation tech-

(continued on page 135)

7. Needham, op. cit., p. 284. For further details see S.K. Chatterji, 'India and China: Ancient Contacts—What India Received from China' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1959), Vol. 1, p. 89.

8. Patricia Berger, 'Preserving the Nation: The Political Uses of Tantric Art in China' in *Latter Days of the Law*, ed. Marsha Weidner (University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 28-124, at p. 92.

9. Ibid., p. 101.

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

Maharaj, how to get rid of egotism?

Always remember that everything is fleeting and transitory; so what will you be proud of? If you are proud of your wealth, remember that there are wealthier people than you. So you have nothing to boast about. Others have better things and in far more quantity than you do; so what are you egotistic about? There are many who are far more intelligent, far more superior in talents than you; so, what are you egotistic about? You should discriminate always in this manner. It is better not to be proud of your wealth because it will not last long. Do not be proud of your so-called appearance because beauty is so impermanent.

There was a poor man. He had an ailing wife at home. He was in such straitened circumstances that one day he decided to commit suicide. On the way he met a monk who just said, 'Times will change!' The poor man then thought of being patient and waited for the change. Slowly the situation improved: his wife regained her health, the poor man became rich and quite happy. His life passed comfortably thereafter. One day, however, he suddenly remembered the monk and his saying, 'Times will change!' The realization dawned in him that his riches, comfort, health and so on are all transitory. He became wise since then.

Remember this verse of Sankara [in the *Śivāparādha-kṣamāpāṇa-stotra*]—

Āyurnaśyati paśyatām pratidinam

*yāti kṣayam yauvanam,
Pratyāyānti gatāḥ punarna divasāḥ
kālo jagad-bhakṣakah;
Lakṣmīstoya-taraṅga-bhaṅga-capalā
vidyuccalam jīvitam
Tasmānmām śaraṇāgataḥ śaraṇada
tvam rakṣa rakṣādhunā.*

Day after day, we see life eroding away, youthfulness fading. The days that go by never return. Time engulfs the world, as it were. The Goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi, is like a wave in the ocean, ever fleeting, ever slipping away. Life is transitory as a lightning. Hence pray to God, 'O God, I seek refuge in you. Please save me now.' That is the meaning of the verse. Now, how do you think God will save us? He will save us by freeing us from illusion about material attachments. However, it needs a lot of effort on our part too.

Why do some holy persons not appeal to us and we dislike their company?

Search your own mind to see if there is any hidden conflict—any unfulfilled desire, any ambition, any ill-feeling. Mental conflicts stop you from seeking holy company. Many are apprehensive to approach a pure monk or nun because they cannot hold on to the high ideals these holy persons inspire us to. Those who have no faith in religion and higher life look upon sadhus as thieves, who cheat society to fill their stomach. That, of course, is another matter.

When Swami Nikhilanandaji was in the

United States, someone asked him, 'Are you one of those people who deprive the common people of their own benefits?' Nikhilanandaji instantly replied: 'I have the grand privilege of belonging to that group to which Jesus Christ belonged.'

Can we not take pride in our guru?

'Mannāthaḥ śrī jagannātho, madguruh śrī jagadguruh, my God is the God of the universe, and my guru is the guru of the whole world,' says the 'Hymn to the Guru'. You must note one thing. The guru you consider to be yours is also the guru of everyone else. He is the Īśvara. The guru ideal has nothing to do with pride; you should have reverence for him, that is all.

They say that the guru should not be regarded as a human being but as one's chosen Deity (iṣṭa); however, in the beginning, we do think of him as a human being...

That is quite all right. It is like this: though we say that the idol is God Himself, initially it appears to us only as a stone image. So the guru, too, is a human being to us in the beginning. But know that your iṣṭa alone is the guru.

Maharaj, what is upāsanā?

There are two important places where Sankara gives his definition of the term upāsanā: one is in his commentary on the Gītā [12.2] and the other, the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad [1.3.9]. There is some slight difference between the two. In the Brhadāranyaka commentary, he says, 'upāsanam nāma upāsyārthavāde yathā devatādi-svarūpaṁ śrutyā jñāpyate tatha manasopagamyā āsanam cintanam.' It will be enough if you know that upāsanā means 'upagamyā āsanam cintanam.' That is, to be near your chosen Ideal and to think of Him without any interruption, like the flow of oil from one vessel to another. 'To be near Him' does not mean going somewhere in order to be near God. It means perceiving Him in your heart—to think of Him

always. This also means that you get closer to Reality. To establish a close and intimate relationship with God, such as considering Him your father or mother is a method to 'get near'. Practising meditation, worship, and so on with or without any attitude in mind that I mentioned can also take you nearer to Him.

Maharaj, how to control the mind?

The nature of the mind is to be restless. You must convince it, by consistent effort, to come around. Sustained endeavour to condition the mind is imperative. Meditation does not come without consistent effort. Fix your mind on God by whatever means possible. Just because you are unable to afford dainty dishes, you will not give up eating at least dry bread, do you not? So also, your inability to attain the state of meditation should not deter you from thinking of God. Constant struggle is necessary, and this will help you control your mind in the course of time. The Gītā mentions two ways of controlling the mind: one is practice (abhyāsa) and the other is apathy about worldly interests (vairāgya). These two must go hand in hand. These two have been mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sūtras [1.12-15] also. Patanjali says, 'Abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tannirodhaḥ.' That means, you can control your mental modifications, vṛttis, by long and sustained practice—dīrghakālānairantarya—which Patanjali calls yatna. He defines vairāgya as apathy towards objects of enjoyment, both seen and heard, 'dṛṣṭānūśravika-viṣaya-vitrṣṇā.'

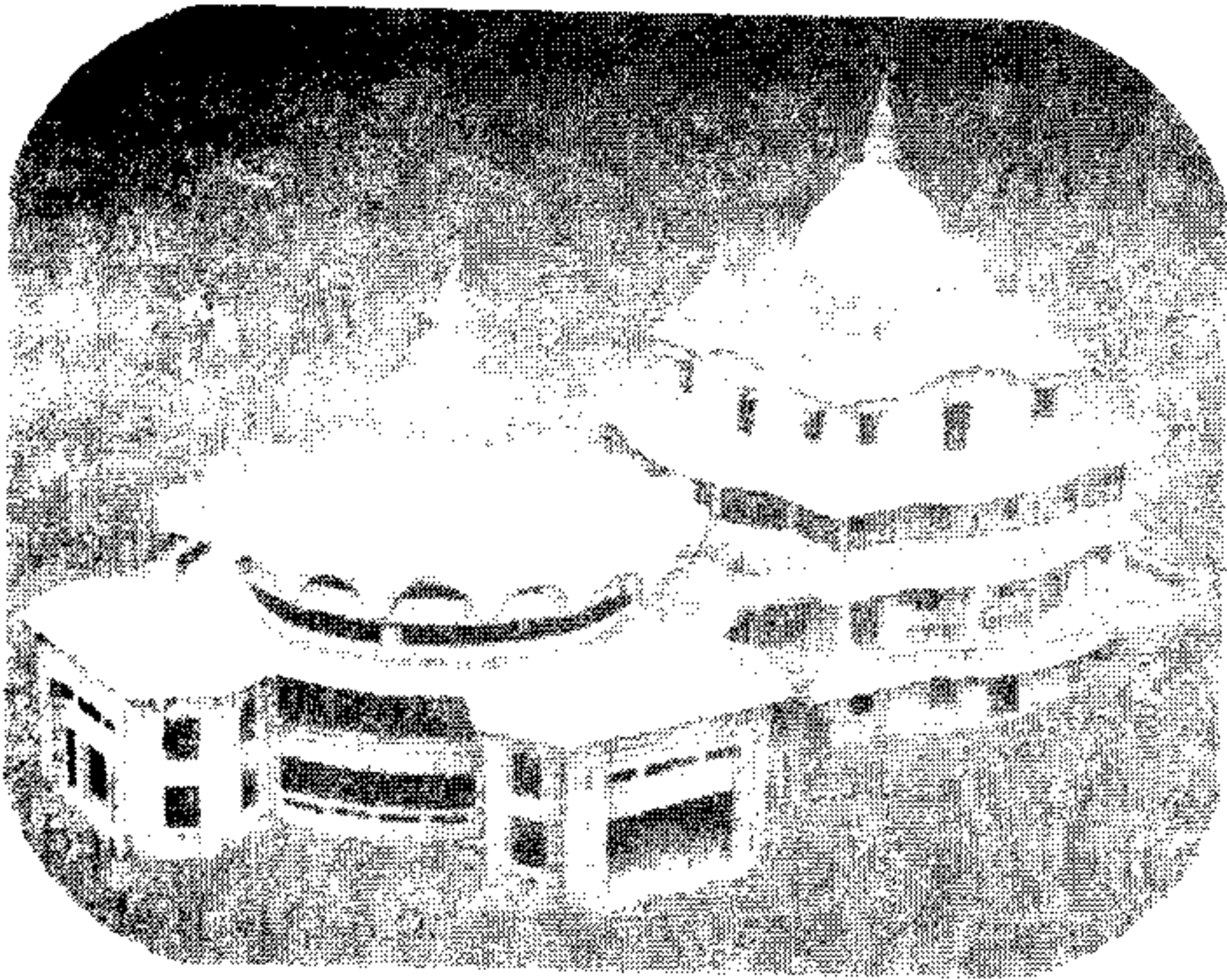
Does meditation or dhyāna mean confining the mind to any specific form?

In our meditation we try to confine God. If He can be perceived as being the entire universe and beyond that too, then there is no confinement. Sri Ramakrishna has said [cf. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 778], 'Is God there only when I close my eyes? Is He not there when I open them?'

—compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

RAMAKRISHNA MATH, LUCKNOW

TEMPLE DEDICATION ON 17 NOVEMBER 1999



A Glorious full view of the new temple



Most Revered President Maharaj, assisted by Swami Prameyanandaji, offering argha to Sri Ramakrishna



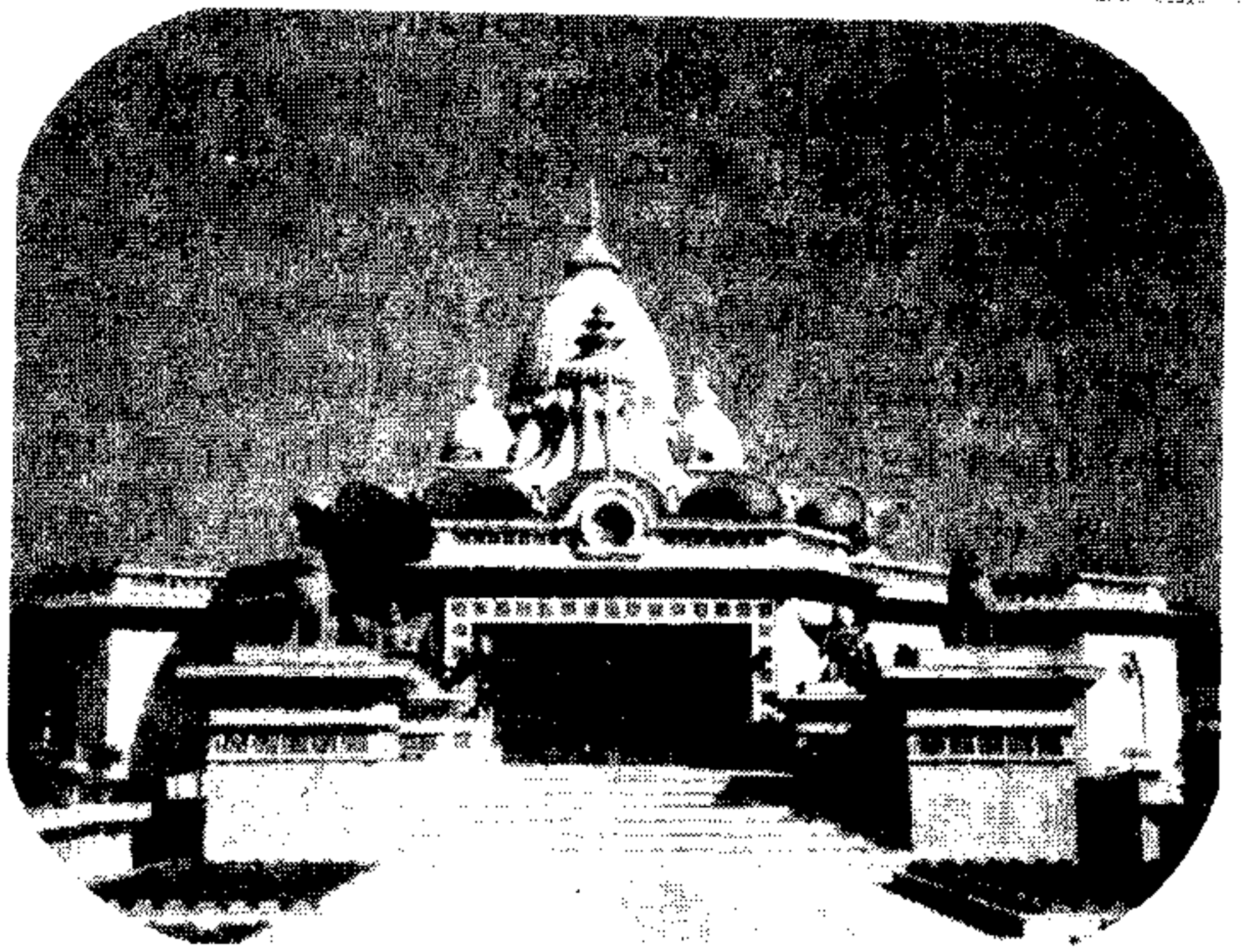
Procession towards the new temple



Worship in the new temple



Most Revered President Maharaj meditating with Revered Vice-President Maharaj-jis and others



The grand front view of the new temple

Puñña or Merit

AJAHN SUCITTO

Venerable Ajahn Sucitto is President of Chithurst Forest Monastery in UK. This beautiful article by Venerable Sucitto is about the Buddhist view of merit.

Puñña (*punya* in Sanskrit) is not very clearly understood often. Making merit, principally through acts of generosity, kindness and virtue, is a very strong point in Theravada Buddhist culture in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, this can be interpreted as rather like buying your place in heaven. You do something now and by that ensure a fortunate rebirth in the future. I am sure that many people do consider merit in that way. But it is important to consider what merit really means in the Buddha's teaching.

The very English word 'merit' sounds like something from Boy Scout days when you got badges and stars for being very good. I never got one. The Pali word is *puñña* and the English words that derive from *puñña* are the odd word 'boon' or the word 'bounty', which is still in use. 'Bounty' gives the feeling of inner wealth or fullness, a certain store, an auspiciousness or a quality of blessedness. To cultivate *puñña* is therefore to cultivate inner wealth or a reservoir of spiritual wealth.

We can develop spiritual strength, fortitude or courage, but here we are not talking in terms of self or in terms of attainment or grasping. The natural result of good practice is that, over time, you do develop a certain clarity of mind, a certain dispassion, a certain lightheartedness. We can see this in another way, that the *puñña* or merit born of good practice are these good results. All *dhamma* practice is about abandoning selfishness. Of course, if we come from self-view, saying, 'Well, how do I make more merit so that I can have a better time and a better life?', then there is no merit attained at all because we have started the whole thing off on the wrong

premise. It has to come from genuine selflessness which, in brief, is what *dhamma* practice is about. Whether we like to meditate or cultivate good qualities, the uniting factor in this is the cultivation of selflessness. If we meditate from self-view, there is no merit. Instead, we tend to get into very repressive mind states, becoming obsessive, neurotic, fanatical or conceited. There is no richness of heart cultivated in that, only another narrow-minded attitude.

It is important to consider this reflection on merit in order to see that our practice should lead, skilfully induced, to a fullness of life. That is something tangible that we can recognize—a fullness of heart, a feeling that arises when we notice that, actually, we are not bothered by things that would have bothered us enormously a few years ago; we have a certain stability or centredness. Of course, we are not considering *dhamma* practice to be meditation alone. We want to cultivate the Eightfold Path, the complete meditation course—Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action—and to cultivate *puñña* or blessings in our daily lives. We do not want a life of constant entropy, gradually wearing us out, leaving us just with some wages and a house and nothing that really stores up goodness or fullness in us. We want to cultivate our lives in such a way that we feel more uplifted, confident and strong within ourselves.

Now the world of materialism is not a place of merit because it does not tend towards selflessness. The materialist ethos encourages us to value possessing, owning and getting more for ourselves. Whatever our personal views are, the line that comes across in

many different ways is that to have more is important—to have the latest or the newest or the fastest or the strongest; and that what we have is more important than what we are.

One easy way of developing merit is to use the material world as a place of sharing and giving. This is a very straightforward utilization of material resources for our own welfare, the welfare of the inner person, the spirit or the heart. If we are acting in a genuinely generous and sharing way, for our own understanding and from the right intention, there is a beautiful quality left in the mind. We are not just looking at life as being about 'me' and 'mine'; we are seeing things at a much broader level.

I remember reading in one of the Buddhist Suttas about some of the great lay disciples like Anathapindika and Vishakha. They were wealthy and yet they gave a lot of their own free will; they realized one thing that rich people often get stuck with and cannot overcome: not only does the amassing of wealth fail to bring happiness but it actually brings a state of extreme fear and anxiety, an enslavement to one's possessions. If you use your time primarily to accumulate wealth, then you will be caught up in the fear of losing it. You will be unable to trust anybody, thinking, 'Maybe they are just close to me because of my riches.' Dealing with a lot of money that people want and crave and which produces such unwholesome responses is living in a state that is not conducive to spiritual uplift.

But Anathapindika and Vishakha wanted to use their financial resources to bring them joy, to feel that they had done enormous good deeds. Vishakha herself asked the Buddha if he would grant her eight boons, eight favours. His reply was, 'Buddhas do not make deals. Perfect Ones are beyond bargaining, Vishakha.' She said, 'But these are blameless, Blessed One.' So he said, 'Well, say what you want.' Vishakha replied, 'I would like to be able to offer bathing cloths to the nuns so that they are not without them when they go down to the riverside, rice gruel

for all the sick monks and nuns, and rain cloths for the monks in the rainy season so that they have something to wear when it is raining and their robes get wet.' She said, 'I would like to do this so that I will have the great joy of recollecting how many good, worthy people I have helped. This will calm and uplift my mind and act as a basis for other factors of enlightenment to arise in me.' Vishakha was very wise. She really knew how best to use her wealth.

Most people never really see their lives in those terms, do they? We do not think, 'What would give me joy, energy, and calm, what will support the foundations of mindfulness and inner composure?' because somehow that seems remote. Also the Buddha recommended that we consider something else that seems remote: our own death. In Buddhist reflections, we consider that our life, within a social convention, is a progression from birth to death. This is what it is, and we fill in the time doing things to keep ourselves alive and to make ourselves happy. But what we really do is we are born and then we die. The human quest is how to make this brief, transitory passage one that somehow steps beyond and is made the most significant or the most fulfilling for us. Where will it really uplift us or take us out of the mere despair of mortality? These transcendental virtues or *pāramitās*, of which generosity is the first, are ways of developing bounty or beauty in the heart. The time of death is the time when consciousness will be reborn dependent upon the person's state of mind at the moment of death. But even while we are alive we can see that the rebirth process just goes on. What we feel like today is the result of our attitudes and deeds in the past months or years. If we live joyously, guiltlessly and can feel good about what we are doing, then at this time and in this life, we know happiness and contentment.

So *puñña* can also be realized in this life. We do not have to wait until we die to see if it works. Certainly, giving and generous peo-

ple, if they know where to look into their heart, can experience great happiness through this feeling of blamelessness and contentment. For a *samana* (Sanskrit, *śramaṇa*), one of the great advantages is the attainment of discipline or virtue. A monk who has trained himself well is said to have attained to the discipline. This does not mean that he simply remembers all the rules but that through training himself, his mind has become very sweet and malleable: no longer blustering, angry, brutal, forceful and aggressive; it is a trained mind. And such a mind is said to have the fragrance of virtue or *sīla-gandho* (Sanskrit, *śīla-gandha*). There is something almost tangibly sweet about a mind that is not cantankerous, obstreperous or aggressive; so this is another kind of *puñña* or merit that can be realized.

Generosity and morality are two of the ten *pāramitās*. Renunciation is another. There is a delightful result in renunciation or *nekhamma* (Sanskrit, *niṣkarma*). It is something that tangibly develops great merit, but not in the sense that if we do good we will get some good marks on the score card when we die. The great boon or blessing of renunciation is this sense of contentment with little, with simplicity. A mind that is happy or in a good state, a mind that has learned to be content with little, is a tangible, discernable blessing that we can realize in our lives. The other *pāramitās* are patience, understanding, energy, resolution, loving kindness, equanimity or serenity, and honesty. None of these is really remote from any of us in our daily lives. We are not necessarily averse to, but are often not focused upon, how to live today in a way that is perhaps more patient, more honest with ourselves and others; or in a way in which we put aside things that are not really necessary. They may not be harmful but they just fill up the space. Instead of just filling up time and space, we can use that time to look at the mind, to cultivate and develop ourselves in some way.

These are not remote possibilities. The

world, in fact, is something that almost requires you to have *pāramitās*, transcendental qualities, just to stay fairly sane and cheerful. If we have no patience or equanimity, then the world is a very despairing place, is it not? If we cannot recognize, accept and embrace the dark and the gloomy, the promises and the hope as one and the same with some serene and unshakable quality, then the mind will always be torn apart by hope and grief.

In Buddhist countries, the *dāna pāramitā* or merit through generosity, is perhaps the simplest and most straightforward—it is just the use of material things. But it is also the most corruptible. The Buddha himself said that there is greater fortune in giving to people who are worthy and the highest kind of giving is to give to a Buddha. Reading this you may, I suppose, be a bit sceptical if you think that what he meant is, 'The highest kind of giving is to give things to me.' Yet we note that whenever people did offer things to the Buddha, he tended to distribute them to the Sangha rather than keeping them for himself. Just to have given to a Buddha means that you have the feeling in your heart that you have used resources in the most skilful way possible; you have given them to a very wise and compassionate being who will not use them selfishly or greedily or abuse your trust.

In this same talk, the Buddha also said that higher than giving alms to a Buddha is being able to watch one inhalation of the breath come and then one exhalation go. So there is a twist, as there often is in the Buddha's teaching. We have this sequence of beings worthy of gifts, starting with an ordinary monk or nun, then an attained one, then a complete saint, then the whole Sangha and then the Buddha; but he says that to be able to watch one inhalation and one exhalation is a much higher kind of merit.

A woman was saying to me, 'Oh, it is very difficult to be completely conscious of the breath. Very few people can do that.' I said, 'No, anybody can do that. Breathe in.' She did. I said, 'You are conscious of that.'

Now breathe out.' She did. 'You were conscious of that. You have done it! You were completely conscious of the breath—there you are, no problem!' Of course, most people want to be able to do that for hours and hours before they feel any good about it. Actually, all it ever is, is just one inhalation, one exhalation, then a repeat performance of the same process. This is where our minds do not get into gear; they are not able to remain that immediate and that is the difficulty.

It is very easy to watch one inhalation and one exhalation; but to *be* just that is somehow a development of all the *pāramitās* in one moment because the self-instinct is to want something out of it. We think, 'If I really develop this meditation, get the whole thing really moving away, get an hour of good practice in, then this will propel me up to some sort of higher or calmer state.' And we think, 'The longer I do it, the higher I will get. If I do a ten-day retreat, I will get so high that I really have attained something.' That is self-view, is it not? It is a refined form of self-view but there is the belief in a historical person who will extend forward in time, some being or some thing that has to be sustained in time.

The more we observe, we realize that nothing is sustained through time except *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma*), rebirth, the process of cause and effect; this causes that. The cells in this body are constantly dividing. Bits of it are flaking off every second. If I had a sharp pair of eyes, I could probably see it happening. Even in the midst of this action, bits of my brain are burning out; fortunately, there are plenty so I am not going to end up completely moronic before I end. This whole process, that seems to be a constant, permanent 'me', is actually more like a fountain of new stuff arising and old stuff passing away, a constant cascade. That is what our life is. I can say that I sat here for one hour, a solid chunk; but actually, what sits here all the time? Who? A body that is constantly changing, mind states

and emotional qualities that are constantly changing, energy states that are going into flux, understanding and non-understanding, interest and dullness, and so on. All constant change; but to take that lesson, to understand it and abide in it, is a little difficult. There is still something in us that feels, 'Yes, that is true. But I want to get something out of this.'

It is true that we can do things that will give rise to fortunate rebirth, to good consequences. To put it very simply, today I am able to write this because of a number of things, one of which is the fact that I have been eating fairly regularly for the last thirty-nine years; this has been a cause for this evening; this has been the effect of it. You owe this write-up to beans, bread, butter, rice and so forth. This work is the rebirth of rice, beans and a few potatoes; that is the energy that is producing this and the thoughts that go through the mind are partly the consequence of just having eaten things. Of course, if we had not done that, we would not be alive at this time.

So we can certainly do things that affect *kamma*, the process and the way our life runs, without really affecting our sense of identification with it or our sense of liberation from it. On the level of what we do from the self-view, we may only be able to affect the rhythm of our *kamma*. This body, however much I feed it, is going to die. That is the way it is. It will feel pain, it will get sick, tired and hungry. No matter how many times I eat, it still gets hungry. So we cannot really affect the basic nature of *kamma*. If there is no merit realized, then this sense of 'I am' is maintained throughout as 'I am happy,' 'I am sad,' 'I am progressing,' 'I am degenerating,' and so on. The highest kind of merit is that which liberates us from *kamma*, from that process of identification with this *kammic* formation. This is where meditation is paramount and a source of great merit. □

Educational Psychology Till Now

DR S. SUNDARAM

After surveying the 120-year-long development of educational psychology, Dr S. Sundaram, Reader, Department of Chemistry, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai, forcefully establishes as supreme Swami Vivekananda's ideas on education.

Psychology may be defined as the study of behaviour. Ultimately it leads to the formulation of the laws of human behaviour. Data collected from animal behaviour under controlled conditions are used to make generalizations; they are further investigated to determine whether they could be extended to human behaviour. Thus a psychologist, in addition to being a natural scientist, is also a social scientist. Teaching and learning naturally come under his purview. Teaching, guidance, the dynamics of personality development, adjustment problems, development during childhood and adolescence, learning, evaluation, and measurement are all areas covered by educational psychology.

The French psychologist Alfred Binet, who was director of the psychological laboratory at Sorbonne, studies the ways of developing some practical means to identify the ability of children as they entered school. He published the results of his tests for the measurement of intelligence in 1905. Later, these findings were adapted according to situations in various countries. For example, the Stanford-Binet revision was published in 1916. Thus, systematic work started in this area only around 1900.

Educational psychologists address themselves to many questions. For example, does practice result in training? Till date, the answers to this question are being investigated. E.L. Thorndike, the renowned educational psychologist, has studied the effect of a mere repetition of a situation on training. He concludes that response does not vary with

the number of repetitions, and that the right responses are largely established by rewards, while punishment has little effect in causing wrong responses.

There is another important area related to transfer and forgetting. According to Lester Anderson of the University of Buffalo, the conditions under which something already learned facilitates or impedes new learning are those under which transfer of learning occurs. Sometimes new learning may make the recall of old ones more difficult, and this is called retroactive inhibition. It forms one facet of forgetting.¹ These ideas are of much consequence to teaching.

Swanson had studied this in 1949 under school settings. She concluded that meaningful methods of instruction are superior to those based on connectionism. This is related to the methodology of instruction.

Similarly other investigators have worked on the different areas of educational psychology to establish it as an academic discipline. Today these findings provide a basis for educational theory and practice. The goals are well-defined: to promote growth and acquisition of knowledge by learning; improvement of social behaviour and personality adjustment; setting up of appropriate conditions for learning; developing an impartial and sympathetic view towards students; developing skills in problem-solving; and,

1. Cf. C.E. Skinner, *Educational Psychology* (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall India, 1990), pp. 10, 389-449.

evaluation and guidance programme for teachers.

What is teaching? When is a teacher teaching? According to Swami Vivekananda, '...no one can teach anybody. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge—even in a boy it is so—and it requires only an awakening, and that much is the work of a teacher. We have to do only so much for the boys that they may learn to apply their own intellect to the proper use of their hands, legs, ears, eyes, etc, and finally everything will become easy.'² This he said in 1898.

Where does our knowledge come from? Do we inherit some knowledge? Are we born with any innate knowledge? Socrates had argued that the knowledge of some natural laws was within each of us. Kant also believed that knowledge can be acquired through routes other than direct experience. In the 18th and 19th centuries, philosophers were especially interested in the origin of knowledge. Some were of the opinion that the mind of a man at birth may be compared to a clean slate. Others argued that knowledge mostly comes to us through sensory information, provided by the receptors. The opinions of educational psychologists were broadly divided into two schools in this respect.³

The British associationists strongly advocated the effectiveness of two factors in the forming of associations, which contribute to learning. They are (1) contiguity and (2) frequency. That is, sensations which occur close together in time or in a perceptual field tend to become associated (contiguity). The more often sense data occur together, the stronger the association between them (frequency).

Mainly, these two rules have been accepted by modern theories of learning.

American psychologists (behaviourists) have worked to formulate concepts of measurable stimuli and responses. Among the modern theorists, mention may be made of Edwin Guthrie, Edward Thorndike and Clarke Hull. While Guthrie emphasized contiguity, Thorndike felt that repetition was an important factor in the acquisition of responses. Hull supported an association theory based on the survival model of life (Darwin's natural selection and survival of the fittest), ie biological needs and their fulfilment incorporating the ideas of Ivan Pavlov (conditioned reflex). Edward Tolman, the founder of the expectancy theory of behaviour, argues that we learn the relation between stimuli around us, ie we learn cognitive maps of our own surroundings. He propounds stimulus-stimulus associations as against stimulus-response relations. According to him, learning does not depend on reinforcements.

B.F. Skinner believes that experiments designed to test predictions from a specific theory are not productive, and are wasteful. He prefers to explore the changes in responses which result from changes made in the situation. He has formulated a system in which he distinguishes between elicited (evoked) response and emitted response. He believes that appropriately applied reinforcements are so potent that they shape our lives in many important ways; he suggests a possible 'utopia' that could be produced with our current knowledge of the effects of reinforcement.

Recently a lot of work has been done on the importance of concept mapping as a tool in learning processes.⁴ Working on instruc-

2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 5, p. 366. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

3. R.L. Isaacson, M.L. Hutt and M.L. Blum, *Psychology: The Science of Behaviour* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p.160.

4. J.D. Novak, D.B. Godwin and G.T. Johansen, *Science Education*, Vol. 67(5), pp. 625-45; and A. Petrovsky, *Age Group and Pedagogical Psychology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), pp. 204-28.

tional strategies, Novak and his coworkers have proposed that two aspects—identification of concepts and presentation of a hierarchy of concepts—would contribute to meaningful learning. These are based on Ausubel's learning theory which places a central emphasis on the influence of the student's prior knowledge on subsequent meaningful learning. Meaningful learning is assumed to result when a person consciously and explicitly ties new knowledge to relevant concepts he already possesses. By contrast, rote learning results when new knowledge is arbitrarily incorporated into cognitive frameworks. Thus, educational psychologists like Piaget believe that knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner, while Ausubel and others lay stress on assimilation. This is the 120-year history of educational psychology.

About 100 years ago Swamiji discussed this subject and has made some important comments and suggestions with his own characteristic clarity and precision. According to him, teaching only means removal of obstacles on the path of the student. He says, 'A child teaches itself. But you can *help* it to go forward in its own way. ... You can take away the obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature. ... a child educates itself. ... I can never teach you anything: you will have to teach yourself, but I can help you perhaps in giving expression to that thought.'⁵ He emphasizes that learning is nothing but a process of unveiling or discovering existing knowledge. According to him, the efforts made by the student are his own internal teacher which improve his power of perception and thought. 'No one was ever really taught by another; each of us has to teach himself. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work and understand things.'⁶ Swamiji refers to Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation and echoes the Vedantic idea that all knowledge is in the human mind. The soul is a mine of

infinite knowledge. 'In many cases it is not discovered, but remains covered, and when the covering is being slowly taken off, we say, "We are learning" Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out.'⁷

In addition, Swamiji feels that negative thoughts weaken the human system. He does not agree with the idea of parents goading their children, constantly taxing them and blaming them for poor performance. Instead, he recommends that positive ideas must be given to them in the form of kind words. 'If you speak kind words to boys and encourage them, they are bound to improve in time.'⁸ He recalls how his revered guru and the teacher of teachers, Sri Ramakrishna, had corrected people whom others had rated as useless human beings. 'We have seen how Sri Ramakrishna would encourage even those whom we considered as worthless and change the very course of their lives thereby! His very method of teaching was a unique phenomenon.'⁹

According to Swamiji, students should be helped to develop 'the power of concentration and detachment.'¹⁰ It is all a question of placing the mind where we want it and as long as we want it. The power of detachment is as important as attachment in training the mind. Mind control may be achieved by systematic breathing. Vivekananda's ideas, though at variance with those of later western educational psychologists, are more pragmatic and result-oriented and merit greater attention. In fact the seeds of a different system of education are contained in his suggestions. He has, in this area also, brought in his pet concept of practical Vedanta, which he firmly believes is the only solution to the uplift of humanity as a whole.

Brahmacarya and *śraddhā* are his twin prescriptions to students.¹¹ The former helps im-

5. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 55.

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 93.

7. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 28.

8. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 170.

9. *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, pp. 170-1.

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 39.

prove concentration and the latter accelerates the process of attaining the specified goal. Swamiji has demonstrated the power of *brahmacarya*.¹² He could take a book, read and understand it, not word by word, but page by page. This is not merely a process of rapid reading alone but one of lasting retention and quick recall too. He is a strong advocate of the modification of help rendered by the teacher according to the needs of the taught and also of *guru-grha-vāsa*. Students are to be taken from where they stand. The Ramakrishna Mission has moved in this direction by establishing students' homes and hostels where students are in close proximity to and under full-time supervision by monks and teachers.

Vivekananda does not believe in mere accumulation of facts and in memorizing voluminous information. Instead, if a student can assimilate even a few ideas the purpose will be served.¹³ This activity of assimilation and application of knowledge has been studied by Russian psychologists in recent times. They have analysed the modes of formation of concepts arising out of assimilation.

Today, half a century after independence, we cannot strictly claim to have achieved all the educational objectives and goals envisaged by our Constitution. Apart from the reports of the various commissions—the Radhakrishnan Commission of 1948-49, the Mudaliar Commission of 1952,

the Kothari Commission of 1964—and the document *Challenge of Education* brought out by the Ministry of Education in 1985, the Government of India has formed a Ministry of Human Resource Development to reorient our system of education. Plans of privatization of higher education on the one hand and of taking education to the doorsteps of the masses on the other are constantly engaging the attention of our policy-makers. But the crying need of the hour is a system of education based on the educational theories outlined by Swami Vivekananda a century ago. We hear so much being talked about human resource development and integrated personality development, but we are indeed reluctant to implement any drastic change in our educational system, be it in the syllabus, the orientation of methods, or in the tools of evaluation. Steps should be taken to formulate a set of new syllabi directed by the ideas of Swamiji. As an experimental measure, at least one school may be started where his ideas are implemented totally, to the letter and spirit, even in the content and methodology of teaching. Later it could be organized on national lines. Swamiji himself admits, 'Of course this is a very big scheme, a very big plan. I do not know whether it will ever work out. But we must begin to work.'¹⁴ But sooner or later our country and the world at large have to imbibe his ideas more wholeheartedly because they are founded on the eternal principles of Vedānta. □

11. *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p. 369.

12. *Education: New Dimensions*, ed. Swami Harshananda (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Math, 1996), p. 3.

13. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 302.

14. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 302.

Practise a little japa and meditation every day. Never stop for a single day. The mind is like a restless child; it wants to run away. You must bring it back again and again and apply it to the meditation on the Lord. Go on in this way for two or three years, and then an inexpressible joy will fill your mind.

—Swami Brahmananda

Vivekananda the Man

As Reflected in His Epistles

PROF B. N. SIKDAR

Prof Sikdar from Calcutta is an avid student of Swami Vivekananda. Many of his brilliant articles have appeared in this journal. In this essay, to be published in two parts, Prof Sikdar analyses Swamiji's personality as revealed in his letters. In all references here, please read '1,2,...' as volume numbers, 'III, XXVI,...' as letter numbers, and '20,580,...' as page numbers in Swamiji's Complete Works.

ONE

No work of Swami Vivekananda is perhaps more revealing of the mosaic patterns of his mind than the epistles. They were, most of them, composed in haste between a tightly packed schedule. This *ipso facto* made them spontaneous, frank and forthright. 'Excuse this hasty scrawl,' he wrote once. There are many without a salutation, which was a usual practice with him.¹ The object of this paper is to try to discern what Vivekananda was like entirely from the internal evidence of his correspondence. However, it must be made clear that the man Vivekananda is not really separable from the monk, the missionary, the patriot and many things besides. The admiration we have for this genius may quite as justly be given to his character, which is a gift of nature and heredity. The power of his influence is the power of character, in the consistency and purity of feelings throughout his life.

One cannot really know all about anyone—far less a great man. The world has yet known no figure as enigmatic as Shakespeare, yet eminent critics (like A.C. Bradley, Leslie Stephen and others) have attempted the task,

which carries a fascination of its own. The reactions to which the human mind is prone under the powerful emotional stimuli of love, death, art, or desire, are of perennial interest. That is part of the charm of life. That again is some justification of this inadequate attempt to decipher the man Vivekananda.

TWO

Since, after all, Swamiji was born human, he certainly had his share of human limitations. I have made no attempt to gloss them over. Was there ever a great man without quirks of temperament? Socrates? Plato? Aristotle? Julius Caesar? Alexander? Asoka? Lincoln? Horace? Goethe?—to name a few at random. *Dormitat Homerus*. Sugared water has no place in a critical approach which must be based on solid ground. Moreover, to churn out literature portraying the great monk in vivid colours would not be much to the taste of the 21st century. Vivekananda's 'limitations' (as seen in his confabulations) are apparent. They were in a large measure the faults intense zeal for a noble cause inevitably tended to foster, especially in its extreme, through natural reactions. The age's flippancies, the undignified acceptance of an alien culture by the intellectual class, their sneering/apologetic attitude to India's precious heritage, their ways and sophistication—incensed Vivekananda. Austere, fastidious, uncompromising on principles, rarely apologetic, frequently condescending, Vivek-

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Vols. 1-8, 1989; Vol. 9, 1997), 7.XXXIX.505; 9.X.11; see also letters XII, XIII, etc. of vol. 7. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

ananda the man had not much tolerance for the average Indian's weaknesses and aberrations. His temperament, like that of many eminent persons, was rooted in an impulse, an impetuosity that involves the man of action, in a presumption on the laws of social responsibility: an idealist whose passions were early set at a pitch of heroic resolution.

It is not the work of a day, and the path is full of the most deadly thorns. ... Come then, look it in the face, brethren, it is a grand task, and we are so low....²

The man is also there in orations/talks/lectures. Delivering a speech or giving a public interview is, to some extent, like acting, in which the player is not himself: he is Agamemnon, Alcestis, Caligula, the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury, or Hamlet. Therefore I believe that the letters, not meant for public consumption at the time of writing, which contain untarnished statements in the author's own idiom, permit a better and closer view of their author's mind and temperament. An eminent editor of letters observed that

...letters enable us in imagination to translate the dry records of history into the living day-to-day experience of individual men and women.³

This series of epistles that indicate a profound root-experience of this great man's own outlook and history are like diamonds not polished on the way to the market (cf. Baudelaire's *D'Autres fois, calme plat, grand mirours De mon desespoir*). Surely such correspondences are not literary *jeu d'esprit*. There is in some of the letters (written between 1900-1902) indications of his fumbling inability to think his way through the events of an extraordinary life to a full understanding of their significance (eg, *Complete Works*, 8.CLIV.490).

2. *Complete Works*, 5.IV.17; letter to Alasinga dated 20 August 1893. See also *Complete Works* 9.XIII.15.

3. *English Letters of the XIX Century*, ed. James Aitken (Penguin, 1946), Introduction.

THREE

In these communications we have unmistakable evidence of the high moral and mental tension at which Vivekananda lived his tragically short life, of his tremendous earnestness, of his ardent patriotism; his disgust, petulance, intolerance of sluggishness, his contempt of dishonesty and hypocritical nature. He thought of earthly existence always as service and strove to the utmost that the task allotted to him by his guru should be well done and fruitfully executed:

(a) Can any work be done unless all of us gird up our loins? And be up and doing! ... We must set the whole world afire.⁴

(b) ...and I want to send them [ie, trained young men] rolling like irresistible waves over India, bringing *comfort, morality, religion, education* to the doors of the meanest and the most downtrodden. *And this I will do or die.*⁵

Surely our man was not simply the epiphanizing sort of a monk. In these confabulations there is evidence of an excellent heart, of amazingly quick mental processes, exceptional organizing ability, dreamy and introspective habit. By sifting through this mass of authentic evidence we could see the broad but basic features of Vivekananda's multi-faceted personality. They bring out the real man more than any other verbal or holographic evidence.

FOUR

Despite a heavy schedule, Swamiji addressed in the course of less than a decade more than six hundred letters. We shall leave aside the inconsequentials, letters of simple query or courtesy, and the heavily edited ones. As we have said, Vivekananda did write fast and scarcely ever checked them over. To him a letter was not a chat. Having written on serious matter to Marie Halboister,

4. *Complete Works*, 8.LIII.353; letter to Swami Abhedananda dated October 1895.

5. *Complete Works*, 8.XV.298 [italics added]; letter to Sri Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 29 February 1894.

he wrote toward the end of a letter, 'You want a chatty letter, don't you? I have not much to chat about.'⁶ Yet he put in now and then some chatting in a few letters to foreign women devotees.⁷

It is good for us, the posterity, that Swamiji let himself go in the epistolar way. Psychologists from ancient Aristotle downwards recognized the safety valve-like function of letting oneself go either individually or vicariously. Every schoolboy knows of Lord Tennyson's 'old nurse of sixty years.' Emotions do rule our health. Consider the fools' (real and assumed) laughter in Shakespeare's master tragedies. The penning of such a number of epistles—should we say—granted the correspondent a few more precious years than if he did not dash off these. This way Vivekananda the man must have achieved some relaxation of tension between his human bounds and divine potentialities.

Secondly, such a large body of correspondence tells us that the writer, like the letter-writers of the 17th-18th century Europe, considered the art a part of necessary social activity as William Wilberforce, M.G. Lewis, Zachary, Macaulay, Hannah, More, Earl of Stanhope, or Dr Johnson did. In these epistolistic peregrinations heart spoke to heart; to Nanjunda Rao, to Alasinga Perumal, to E.T. Sturdy; to 'Dear Rakhal,' 'Dear Shashi,' 'Dear Brahmananda,' 'Dear Akhandananda,' 'Dear Swarup[ananda],' Shivananda, Turiyananda, J.J. Goodwin, Mrs Ole Bull, the Sevier couple, to Sister Nivedita, and the rest of the monk's admirers or friends. To his brother-disciples Vivekananda wrote most often the lengthiest disquisitions.

FIVE

Cursory reading is apt to overlook the interweaving comments that give us a sense of the individuals, the *dramatis personae* in a

high drama as refracted through the Vivekanandian medium. These impressions arise largely from the writer's digressions and insertions. We make acquaintance with Fakir who is 'bothering his head with religious theories';⁸ with Alasinga Perumal (one of the clearly delineated) who is advised to steer clear of falsehood, conflict with people, to be patient with everybody;⁹ with Kidi who is taxing his 'head with metaphysical nonsense and others by your bigotry.'¹⁰ We meet Dr Carpenter of Oxford (England), as a lecturer on the ethics of Buddhism 'very sympathetic and scholarly';¹¹ the 'emotional'¹² G.G., indulging in 'foolish talk';¹³ *laidy* Marie Hale 'enjoying Florence and Italy';¹⁴ Gangadhar who has been to Tibet on foot over the Himalayas and yet not satiated with pilgrimage.¹⁵ We also hear of Mr Colville from Boston who speaks 'under spirit control' (*as said*);¹⁶ the editor of the *Universal Truth* 'conducting religious services and holding classes to heal all manner of diseases.'¹⁷ There are Mrs H.O. Quarry at Swampscott, who 'can swamp a house for all that, not to speak of a cott';¹⁸ Mr Bose—'a man, a brick.'¹⁹ Shashi and others are advised to pay all attention to their health.²⁰ We read of the 'heroic'²¹ Sarada who is a competent writer, and Akhandananda, carrying on *jiva-seva* so well as to be the recipient of 'a hundred thousand embraces.'²² Besides, there are the 'jewels' and 'angels' like

8. *Complete Works*, 5.I.3.

9. *Complete Works*, 5.XXIV.55.

10. *Complete Works*, 5.XXIII.55.

11. *Complete Works*, 5.XXVI.59.

12. *Complete Works*, 5.XXVII.61.

13. *Complete Works*, 5.XXIX.64.

14. *Complete Works*, 5.CIII.159.

15. *Complete Works*, 6.XI.215.

16. *Complete Works*, 6.XLIV.259.

17. *Complete Works*, 6.XLIV.259.

18. *Complete Works*, 9.XXX.37.

19. *Complete Works*, 9.CCXXV.186.

20. *Complete Works*, 6.LXIII.304.

21. *Complete Works*, 6.XCI.356.

22. *Complete Works*, 6.CXXVIII.400.

6. *Complete Works*, 8.CXXXIX.467.

7. *Complete Works*, 8.CLXXXIII.526; 8.CLXXXV.527. See also 9.CCXXV.186-7; letter to Sister Christine dated 14 June 1902.

Mrs Leggett, Mrs Ole Bull, the Sevier couple; and the noblest of them all, Miss Margaret Noble, who is granted the privilege of getting hints of her Master's innermost thoughts. The monk's perceptions and priorities become no less apparent.²³ These vignettes connect a by-gone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. All together, in these epistles we note the gradual waning of the old aristocracy, as against the solidly based energy of common life.

This is one more aspect, the historical value of these epistles.

The earliest of the monk's communications (as *Complete Works* prints) is dated 12 August 1888; the last (dated 21 June 1902) was written two weeks before their author's famished soul soared to infinity. Some trivial ones excepted,²⁴ they show the man transcending doubt and anxiety²⁵ and 'launching his boat in the waves'²⁶ resolved to do and die. We also perceive a personality endowed by nature with an accurate and penetrating gaze, a self-appraising trend fostered in him by the very nature of his religious experience. Vivekananda, we come to see, understood the tortuousities of the human heart, the shortcomings of eastern and western cultures, as well as their excellences. He wanted (and succeeded to some extent) to interpret the one to the other and wished the best of both to be imbibed by all. The society he took to be an organic whole in which every individual had his/her appointed place and task. His experience with, and study of, human nature did not preclude suffering and eccentricities of the individual and national type:

(a) This world is a most trying place, and it is long since I have taken to wander-

ing with the lantern of the Grecian Philosopher in hand.²⁷

(b) We have brains, but no hands. We have the doctrine of Vedanta, but we have not the power to reduce it into practice.²⁸

(c) Here [USA] is a manifestation of tremendous energy. ... They look with veneration upon women, who play a most prominent part in their lives.²⁹

A close observer of the coarse texture of everyday life, and one of the most forceful exponents of the flagrant abuses of the time, our monk vindicated reform bravely to the end. His 'homilies' were directed to promoting moral courage, satirized the immoralities of custom.

(a) I hate the very name of marriage, in regard to a boy or a girl.³⁰

(b) Poor fellows! Whatever the rascally and wily priests teach them—all sorts of mummary and tomfoolery as the very gist of the Vedas and Hinduism (mind you, neither these rascals of priests nor their forefathers have so much as *seen* a volume of the Vedas for the last 400 generations)—they follow and degrade themselves.³¹

Letter after letter insists that his compatriots devote themselves to the task of founding a central organization with centres all over the subcontinent and abroad, that would cater to *jiva-seva*.

Work on, brave hearts, fail not — no saying nay; work on — the Lord is behind the work. Mahashakti is with you³²

wrote he to Alasinga Perumal on 6 August 1896. In his characteristic way Vivekananda framed for his brethren slogans that were sharp and loud: *Victory to the Lord... To work! To Work!... Hold on... Be Brave!... Dare any-*

23. *Complete Works*, 6.VII.205-7; 7.XIV.459; 8.CXIV.435.

24. *Complete Works*, 5.XCI.149; 6.XVII.220; 7.XIX.465; 8.LI.350.

25. *Complete Works*, 5.IV.12, 18.

26. *Complete Works*, 9.CCXXV.187.

27. *Complete Works*, 7.XLIII.513.

28. *Complete Works*, 5.LXXIV.126-7.

29. *Complete Works*, 6.XLVII.272.

30. *Complete Works*, 5.IX.33.

31. *Complete Works*, 8.IX.290; letter to Sri Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 22 August 1892, see postscript.

32. *Complete Works*, 5.LXIII.110.

thing and everything. Like a commander, our Swami was ever demanding obedience, loyalty, discipline (cf. General Booth of the Salvation Army); once he quoted from Lord Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade': 'ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die.'³³ The chief of Sri Ramakrishna was too impetuous to perceive that an idea and a plan do not take a shape without some time-lag, especially when one wanted a job done perfectly. To a perfectionist tasks loom larger.

SIX

Of Vivekananda's pregnant, forceful and fancy-catching observations we shall cite only three (in the hope that young readers would fish more in the course of their own reading):

(a) The slave and the tyrant are synonymous.³⁴

(b) Charity opens the heart, but work on through that wedge.³⁵

(c) Streams will be in the desert and the beggar will have plenty, if He wills it.³⁶

Such gems of pithy sayings lie scattered in the body of the man's correspondence; he scatters them like grapeshot. Only the finest fancy and wit can do so; for instance, Rousseau and Voltaire.

Besides, there is a lot of sinewy criticism which crops up not infrequently in the epistles: 'There is a colossal figure of Death, a huge female skeleton covered with a shrivelled skin—the awful fidelity to anatomical details are frightening and disgusting.'³⁷ Sometimes openly, at other times tacitly the great teacher recommends a system of thought or a way of life. We do not need to believe in any puritanic creed in order 'to be good and to do good to one and all';³⁸ again,

he wrote from Reading (USA) on 27 April 1896, 'It will be a great pity if any feeling of jealousy or egotism gain ground amongst you.'³⁹ Throughout life he was really so alone, so aloof internally from his surroundings though he did not like at all to be such! 'Don't care where I go, and when. Now perfectly resigned; Mother knows; a great change, peacefulness is coming on me....'⁴⁰

The Vivekanandian mind often tried to probe unsearchable mysteries and speculate 'thoughts beyond the reach of our souls' (*Hamlet*, I.IV). Consequently, a divine discontent seems ever to burn deep within him. Life was grand and grave and harsh for this man.⁴¹

SEVEN

It is seen in these epistles that the Vivekananda of later years did not reach such equanimity without a bitter and long inner struggle. There are many in these correspondences that today appear rude, unpleasant and harsh and critical in tone and statement. Some inherent characteristics of his own people (Lord Macaulay was not after all beside the point in his essay on the 'Impeachment of Warren Hastings') inflamed Swamiji. Such epithets as *damaging*—though justified—as *imbecile, animals, fools, power-loving, dishonest, cowards, eunuchs*, and so on occur not too infrequently—directly, and others, by implication.⁴² They seem bad now but it was just the kind of shock needed to galvanize a race sunk in inertia—death-like, putrefying—for epochs. It is a lava flood of ire for our individual and racial instincts in some of the communications. Some inherent characteristics of his own people, like intransigence, truculence, hypocrisy, indolence and backbiting traits he detested beyond measure. His insight had

33. *Complete Works*, 5.V.23.

34. *Complete Works*, 5.IV.14.

35. *Complete Works*, 8.XL.508.

36. *Complete Works*, 6.LXII.303.

37. *Complete Works*, 8.LXXXVIII.395-6; letter to Mary Hale.

38. *Complete Works*, 6.XXXVI.245.

39. *Complete Works*, 7.XXXII.491.

40. *Complete Works*, 8.CLXIII.502.

41. See for example, *Complete Works*, 6.CLXI.429.

42. Consider especially, *Complete Works*, 5.LXXVIII.134; 5.LXVIII.117; 5.XLIII.86; 6.LXXVI.327, to cite four.

discerned grievous wrongs in the history of his own land, and had seen that those wrongs have a way of living on into the present.

Foreigners, too, are not spared although there is less of unrestrained outburst in the letters to E.T. Sturdy, Miss Mary Hale, Mrs Bull and others. Once Mary Hale had been so presumptuous as to offend by 'criticism' on 'a scene' between Vivekananda and a Presbyterian gentleman who 'got very hot, angry and abusive' at Miss Thursby's. Some lines of our monk in reply run like the following:⁴³

I know full well how good it is for one's worldly prospects to be *sweet*. I do everything to be *sweet*, but when it comes to a horrible compromise with the truth within, then I stop. I do not believe in *humility*. I believe in *Samadarshitva*—same state of mind with regard to all.... I am so, so sorry, Sister, that I cannot make myself sweet and accommodating to every black falsehood....

The letter goes on and on and after detours returns to: 'May Uma open the door of truth for you and take away all your delusions!'⁴⁴ Vivekananda could never make truth palat-

able by candy-coating it.

Sometimes he vacillated between one mood and another rather rapidly. In a letter to Shri Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 15 November 1894 (3?),⁴⁵ he writes: 'I can, if I will, live here all my life in the greatest luxury; but I am a Sannyasin, and "India, with all thy faults I love thee still."' A few lines later, 'I am ashamed of my own nation when I compare their beggarly, selfish, unappreciative, ignorant ungratefulness with the help, hospitality, sympathy, and respect which the Americans have shown to me, a representative of a foreign religion.'

The generation coming up may very well be stumped by, and grin at, such apparently egotistic pronouncements as 'I have succeeded now in rousing the very heart of the American civilization, New York...'⁴⁶ or, 'I have a message, and I will give it after my own fashion.'⁴⁷ Worse appears in one to a dignitary from Chicago: 'Human help I spurn with my foot.'⁴⁸ Imperiousness, world history tells us, never squeaks, it proclaims.

(to be continued)

43. *Complete Works*, 5.XXXII.70-1.

44. See also *Complete Works*, 8.XXVI.320; 8.XXXIII.327; 8.LXXII.375.

45. *Complete Works*, 8.XXXIII.327.

46. *Complete Works*, 5.LVIII.104.

47. *Complete Works*, 5.XXXII.72; to Miss Mary Hale on 1 February 1895.

48. *Complete Works*, 8.XX.309; letter to Sri Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 20 June 1894.

Chinese Buddhism and Vedanta - III

(continued from page 118)

niques including profound states of concentration, inner heat, psychic powers, and so on. This interest may have arisen in China itself, or may have possibly arisen from an ancient civilization from Babylonia or elsewhere; there is no evidence to suggest an Indian origin. Second, the first to the eighth centuries saw intensive exchanges of religious ideas, texts, and practices between the two coun-

tries; there is evidence of Chinese influence in goddess worship and tantra particularly in border areas like Assam and Bengal. Third, partly due to political developments like the Mongol invasion of China, tantric techniques spread to most part of China, including those far away from frontier regions, and are still practised today.

(to be continued)

Miracle

The priest was sad. Perhaps Mother Nature too knew about it. Why was she so silent today? Why had darkness enveloped everything? It appeared as if everywhere, everything, everyone was sad.

Sad indeed. Was it not the last day? How could the old man persuade his family? How could his wife be argued into accepting him? Who would listen to him after all?

However, it was not anybody's fault. And no one was against him either. He was old. Old age is bound to catch up with us. So that had to be the last day.

The old priest slowly lifted the waterpot, performed *ācamana*, and began the evening service. He tried to quell the tornado that was creating a havoc inside him but could not. By degrees, he continued his worship. He slowly offered flowers at Krishna's feet. When he placed his head on the Lord's feet, he could not lift it for a long while. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He said, 'My Krishna! It is all over. Today is the last day!'

The priest controlled himself and continued his *pūjā* step by step. It was time to offer food to Krishna. He placed the food offering before the image and slowly uttered relevant mantras. He went into deep meditation while the food was being offered to Krishna. It was time for performing *ārati*. The priest slowly got up. He could only manage to perform *ārati* as emotions had overpowered him.

The priest could no longer control himself. He wept aloud. No one was there in the temple then. 'So, my dear Krishna! Today is the last day. I shall not worship you from tomorrow. I know you were not satisfied with my service. Or else, would you have been so happy at my leaving?' His own words seemed to pain the priest. He instantly added,

'No, no, my Lord! It is all my problem. I am old. I cannot walk straight; I am bent. I cannot perform service in a proper way to you any more. My hand cannot touch your lotus-face. I cannot decorate your forehead with sandal paste. I am old...I am old.'

For over 30 years, how ardently had the priest served Krishna in this temple! Not a day was he seen to be irritated. Not a day was he absent from service. Not once was he seen to be tired of worship. As days passed, the priest's love for Krishna increased ever so greatly. Krishna became his very life. He worried day and night about his Krishna: how to feed him, how to serve him, how to make him happy. People around were all greatly pleased by his devotion. He was a highly respected man around.

Time is a great deceiver. It will not listen to any wail or woe, but marches on. Thus, the priest had become old now. His back was bent. With the passing of days, the back got bent further. It became increasingly difficult for this old man to wipe Krishna's face, to put sandal-paste mark (*tilaka*) on his forehead, to place flowers, to decorate the Lord with garlands, and so on. It was a matter of great pain for the priest to be deprived of serving Krishna well. He would talk about this at home. His wife would say, 'You are growing old. Why not let our son perform the worship in future?' But the brahmin was mad with the desire to serve Krishna. How would he live without serving him?

One morning, when the brahmin confessed his inability to put *tilaka* on the forehead of Krishna as he could not reach the Lord's face, his wife and son argued convincingly. 'You have worshipped Krishna enough. From tomorrow, you need not go to

the temple. Take rest. Your son will take charge of the duties and will perform everything well,' said the wife. 'No, no. I shall continue till I breathe my last,' retorted the priest. But to bring them around was not possible this time. 'We are firm this time. You will stop worshipping from tomorrow.' 'From tomorrow?' the shocked priest asked. The thought came to him then that his son could assist him in worship. That proposal, too, was rejected. The loving household was firm. The priest argued. But repeated requests, tears, and so on slowly forced the priest to agree.

Thus, he was doing his duty for the last time. From the next day, the son would take up his father's place. The priest was pained greatly. 'How unfortunate I am!' he thought. 'I had only one desire in life: to serve the Lord to my heart's content till the end of my life. But now? I shall have to retire.' He turned to his Krishna: 'My Lord! Please accept my last day's service. Pardon me for all the errors committed all these years. Owing to ignorance, I could not serve you well. You have graciously accepted my services. Now, I have become old and shall have to quit. But I don't want to quit, O Krishna! I want to serve you to my heart's content. What else do I have in my life? What other desire is there but to serve you? It is all owing to my hunched figure that I cannot serve you, for my hands cannot reach you....' Tears rolled down in torrents even as the brahmin concluded his evening service. He repeatedly saluted the Lord, completed formalities of closing the temple and slowly walked back to his house.

The brahmin could not sleep for the whole night. As he had served Krishna for so long a loving relationship had grown between the two. And the service had ended. Various thoughts came to him. He thought that the Lord was not interested in accepting his services. Or else, why was he a hunchback? Why was he not able to serve the Lord?

The brahmin's agitation and pain grew and he could not sleep. It was his daily habit to wake up very early, and after ablutions, go

to the temple to wake up his dear Krishna from sleep, to clean the temple, to wipe the face of the image, to offer morning's sweets to him, to perform morning *ārati* and to make things ready for worship. That morning too he was up, but lest he again begin worship, his son dissuaded him from going that early to the temple. The son knew what all needed to be done in the temple. With a heavy heart, the priest walked slowly towards the nearby pond for bath. He took bath and was about to walk back when he heard his son's shouts. In the otherwise calm and beautiful village, there would hardly be a sound at such an early hour. But today, his son's cries seemed to wake up the entire village. 'Father! O father! It's a miracle!' The son panted for breath even as he tried to tell his dear father what had happened.

'What happened, my son? Why do you appear so agitated?' asked the anxious father. Was the son able to go to the temple on time? Did he wake up Lord Krishna as usual?

'Father, come to the temple immediately! It is a miracle! Lord Krishna has sat down!'

'Sat down? What do you mean sat down?' cried the stunned father.

'When I opened the door of the sanctum and lit the lamp, I was surprised by something unusual. In the dim light, I could not understand what it was all about. However, when I brightened the area, to my astonishment, I found the Lord's image, instead of its usual standing posture, sitting!'

Hardly had these words fallen on the priest's ears than he ran. He ran to the temple like one mad. And there, he saw his sweetly smiling Krishna sitting. It was an invitation for the hunchback brahmin to continue his worship as before. The Lord had taken pity on his servant. In order to facilitate the priest's service, he had sat down!

Orissa, parts of which was devastated by floods and cyclone recently, has given birth to numerous great saints. The Sākṣi Gopāl temple near Puri stands as a living testimony of God's love for human beings. □

Book Reviews

TWO OPINIONS

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, *INSAN-E-KAMAL—REVISIONING*: By Som Ranchan. Published by Indian Publishers Distributors, 156-D Kamala Nagar, New Delhi, 110007. 1998. Pp. 115. Rs. 200.

First Opinion

This insightful book deals with the master-hero of the Indian renaissance who shook off the inertia of his countrymen and synthesized the best of modernity and tradition, of science and religion, and of the East and the West with twin objectives—to satiate man's quest for the ultimate Reality as also to provide a blueprint for happy and healthy living in this world.

Som Ranchan provides in a succinct manner, a cavalcade of western formulations on the hero monomyth to serve as controlling and interpreting perspectives and to find out how and to what extent Swami Vivekananda fits in that frame. Besides, he presents his life and message in a psychological idiom marked by originality and deep spiritual insight.

Sometimes, the hero turns out to be a prophet as in the case of Swami Vivekananda. While the hero becomes a bore, to use an Emersonian phrase, the prophet has an everlasting worth. A.D. Nock's definition of a prophet as 'a man who experiences a sudden and profound dissatisfaction with things as they are, is fired with a new idea and launches out on a new path in a sincere conviction that he has been led by something external and objective...' amply fits the life of Swami Vivekananda.

Heroism has no model, asserted Louis Antoine Leon De Saint Just. Yet some typology is necessary to understand the dynamics of a heroic personality. Although Freud does not have any paradigm on the hero, Ranchan brilliantly deduces the hero-idea from Freudian psychology. The hero is a person who 'resolves his Oedipal successfully, clears his earlier infantile stages and achieves a functional maturity, mediating Eros and Thanatos and balancing the pulls and counterpulls of the basic mechanism, namely of Reality, Pleasure, Polarity...' Ranchan holds that 'in the case of Swami Vivekananda, Freud's formulations on Thanatos and Eros are applicable. Eros offered by Sri Ramakrishna...saved him from the pit of nothingness and despair.' Eros, of course, did not displace Thanatos. 'But the tension between the two in

Swami Vivekananda's case generated superior spiritual logos different from the one he was used to in his college days when he was given to T.H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, David Hume, Binet and Comte.'

The heroic soul does not sell its justice and its nobleness, wrote Emerson. 'It does not ask to dine nicely and to sleep warm. The essence of greatness is the perception that virtue is enough. Poverty is its ornament.' Elaborating upon the Emersonian dictum, Ranchan maintains that a hero lives for a purpose larger than his age. Vivekananda was cast in the service mould and identified himself with the poorest of the poor. If he had settled down with his brother monks at Dakshineswar and lived as a traditional monk completely oblivious of the miserable plight of his countrymen, he would not have been acclaimed as the messiah of the down-trodden.

Vivekananda's encounter with the orthodox, the cynics and sceptics, the proselytizers among Christians and religious mountebanks and megalomaniacs during his *wanderjahre* in India and the West clearly prove the strength of his spirit as also the power of the ratiocinative faculty.

Otto Rank describes the hero in terms of immortality which is categorized at the biological level as emamism and at the level of the spirit as animism (after anima which means soul or consciousness). Ranchan finds in Vivekananda 'a twinning of emamism and animism.' He contends that he does not exemplify the romantic urge to heroism. But 'he does represent the charge of anima.' In this context, it may be noted that the missionaries in the West accused Swami Vivekananda of moving freely with lady devotees. But as a truly realized soul, he did not see any distinction between man and woman. 'If the missionaries tell you that I have ever broken the two great vows of the Sannyasin—chastity and poverty—tell them that they are *big liars*,' wrote Swami Vivekananda to Alasinga. In another letter to M.N. Bhattacharya he wrote: 'The women in America are very sentimental and have a mania for romance. I am, however, a strange sort of animal who has not any

romantic feeling, and, therefore, they could not sustain any such feeling toward me and they show me great respect. I make them call me "father" or "brother".

The hero archetype of Joseph Campbell has a greater appeal to Ranchan due to its propinquity with Vivekananda. The hero, says Campbell, is someone who has found or achieved or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. 'A hero probably is someone who has given his life to something bigger than himself or other than himself.' The hero is a pathfinder which Vivekananda was. 'He is the harbinger of hope...the eidolon of eternity.'

Ranchan holds that Vivekananda transcends the parameters of a hero set by Freud, Adler, Jung, Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell, because of his 'spiritual dictums.' He gives full credit to his venerable teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, for igniting the light of spirituality in him, although one needs to recall at the same time that the Master saw his disciple (Narendra at that time) to be the incarnation of Narayana born on earth to remove the misery of humankind.

Ranchan's psycho-biographical profile of Swami Vivekananda bespeaks his erudition. Like a Vedantist, he holds that Swamiji's biography cannot be explained in surface terms, ie, in terms of the milieu or the zeitgeist. The soul factors which are best explained 'through the subtle alternate world...and the subtle supraordinate universe' must also be taken note of. Vivekananda's mother's prayer to Lord Shiva for a son—his prototype in qualities, Sri Ramakrishna's premonition that Narendra would one day shake the world to its foundations, and the fact that Vivekananda often saw a ball of light hovering over his head before sleeping, require an explanation which transcends gross human reason.

In the process of cartographing Vivekananda's life, Ranchan delineates a number of innovative and interesting facts. Contrary to Sudhir Kakar's formulations (*Inner Mind*, Oxford University Press) that Vivekananda was closer to his mother or that he did not identify with the adult males in his joint family, Ranchan holds that Swamiji was as close to his father as to his mother and that he mixed well in the family despite his mother's occasional tantrums or his grand uncle's suppressive instinct. Besides, Ranchan refers to Vivekananda's college days, his multifaceted genius, his spiritual quest, his early aversion towards the goddess Kali, his supreme realization, his tour of India after the death of Sri Ramakrishna and the insights he gained about the 'millions of oppressed Narayanas' of his country, and his resolve to mitigate their lot. Vivekananda's decision to go to the US to represent Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament of

Religions was aimed at ushering in the process of give and take. This is best explained by a letter which Swamiji wrote to Haripada Mitra from the US (28 December 1893): 'As regards spirituality, the Americans are far inferior to us but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality and assimilate what is best in their society.'

Ranchan devotes a chapter to describing Vivekananda's relationship with the archetypes, with deities and divinities such as Kali, Shiva, Buddha and Christ. Despite his early repugnance for Kali, Vivekananda gradually accepted her as the Mother of the Universe. In particular, he was in tune with the death dealing aspect of the Adya-Kali archetype and exhorted his countrymen to realize her to overcome their inhibition and effeminacy. At times he saw her as Shiva's Shakti, at other times as the prime mover of the universe. His adoration of Shiva goes back to his days of childhood. Shiva to him denoted 'freedom from all bondages be it of family, clan, society, nation.' 'The Song of the Sannyasin' which he wrote explicates such feelings. The mantra which he constantly muttered was *Śivo'ham*, which means 'I am Shiva'. He was also drawn towards Buddha's purity, compassion, and spirit of enquiry, his rejection of redundant rituals and superstitions and his emphasis on faith in oneself. But he was critical of Buddha's exclusive emphasis on *mokṣa* and 'other-worldliness' which had deprived society of vigour and manliness and regarded Buddhism as the fulfilment of Hinduism. Likewise, Vivekananda had great admiration for Jesus Christ, and even described him 'an advaitist' on one occasion but he disparaged the Christians who did not imbibe the prophet's divine traits, and the missionaries who went about converting people all over the globe to gain demographic hegemony over men of other faiths. Vivekananda may thus be described as 'a post-modernist in his relationship with the archetypes.' Swami Vivekananda attracted large audiences both in the West and in his own motherland. In Ranchan's view the pulling power at the bottom was his feeling. This was rooted in the Vedantic vision of man which perceives the same Self in all.

Vivekananda's message to humankind was to realize the divinity of human nature, to see humanity as one unit, to transcend the world of maya with a view to realizing one's oneness with the absolute Reality, and to discern the basic unity among all religions. The leit motif perceived by Ranchan in Vivekananda's discourses is the gospel of strength, in its comprehensive form. He was thus 'an apostle of activism' in worldly life. At a higher level, he proved to be 'the forerunner to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.'

The book is thought-provoking and it enriches

the field of Vivekananda studies. An ordinary reader who is not well versed in psychological formulations may, however, find the reading a bit difficult. An index and a bibliography of works on Swami Vivekananda would have further added to the value of the book.

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Second Opinion

This is, the write-up claims to be, 'an original interpretation of the great Swami's life and message in the light of western psychological formulations on the hero archetype and in the light of the archetypes of Kali, Shiva, Buddha, etc activated in him.' Accordingly, there are five chapters giving what the author calls a psycho-biographical profile together with perspectives on the hero archetypes at work. An epilogue rounds off the book.

Given this framework one would have expected a carefully argued and cautiously worded study. Unfortunately, the author is not able to integrate his insights into the mainstream of Swamiji's life and message. For instance, he tries to trace the influence of his father on Swamiji but it is difficult to make out what he sometimes means by a certain concept. An example is his valid observation that 'father and mother meet in Swami Vivekananda in a rich mesh.' But when he observes that 'the basic profile of Swami Vivekananda has been presented in terms of the parental syzygy as operating in him, perhaps it is important to present a few specifics of his childhood, especially to show the soul factors at work,' I for one could not make out what Professor Ranchan means by 'syzygy' in Swamiji. Similar is his observation that the titanic motif is recurrent which of course is self-explanatory but too technical. Moreover, the use of the concept of archetype seems to me slightly imprecise. I found it puzzling that Ramakrishna's vision of who Swamiji is and of course who he himself is, is described as 'a visitation from the supraordinate universe.' Perhaps it is not fair to describe it as Ramakrishna's 'flashing back' to his own psyche and 'projecting' it on to check 'the veracity of his projection.'

It is also intriguing that the professor, declaring Swamiji to be no innocent abroad or 'a sado-masochistic low-down tantric,' describes his 'settled' stance on the Terrible Mother as a 'radical shift.' And the shift is naively described as 'a compensatory corrective of the traditional infantilism.' It seems to me that the author still relies on the pathological analytic frames devised by western psychologists as compensatory correctives for their own break with spiritual traditions. This kind

of approach has a tendency to run with the hare of Indian spirituality and hunt with the hounds of western pathology. This is evident in Eros-Thantos binary used by the author (his finding Walt Whitman as the closest analogy is interesting but he has not suggested why it is such). Once this frame is given, the entire brood of Oedipal conflict—reality, pleasure principle, etc—come running. Rather, not running but limping. For instance, in spite of marginal awareness of this problem, the author claims, 'In the case of Swami Vivekananda, Freud's formulations on Thanatos and Eros are applicable. Eros offered by Sri Ramakrishna, and that too rarest of kind, saved him from the pit of nothingness and despair.' It would be uncharitable to call this as inane idiom of ill-digested psychology, but one feels that the insight has not been linked to the psychological frames of Indian origin which gave the basic metaphors to these two people.

Contradictions seem to mar the arguments at some points. For instance, it is claimed that 'though Swami's experience of Christ is visionary and archetypal, Swami never questioned the historicity of Christ as it had passed into the religious stream of Christianity.' In the succeeding paragraph we are also told that the line between the historical and the archetypal cannot be sustained. But then, when it is observed that 'the deities become divinities, and divinities deities,' we do expect clarity in this labyrinth of archetype, history, deity and divinity. Arguing that Swamiji anticipates Jungian formulations is a pious tribute in the absence of sustained correlations. Similarly it is only to be expected that Swamiji's message particularly of strength and manliness should be valorized and not even consistently. For, the professor observes in the same breath, 'His valorization of strength should not be seen as the bent of his temperament in that he was a macho man because he is aware of the fact that he was deeply feminine.' Swamiji is dutifully quoted out of context and with extreme vagueness in terminology. No wonder we have sentences like 'the Swami was for female empowerment' which to say the least is highly equivocal.

One gets the impression that the professor is torn between his loyalty to western psychology and admiration for Swamiji. Perhaps the attempt is to raise Swamiji's stature in terms of popular western psychological motifs of a folk variety. Thus, it remains, alas, an attempt and nothing much. (Several syntactical infelicities should have been ironed out, but perhaps psychology does not permit precision in language.)

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A PORTRAIT OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA: By Akshay Kumar Sen. Translated and edited from Bengali by Amrita M. Salm, Satchidananda Dhar and Prasun Kumar De. Published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700029. 1998. Pp. 888. Rs.250.

Western Opinion

There are not many books that are guaranteed to put a devotee in an elevated mood after a few hours of reading, but this is one of them. The editors/translators have performed an enormous service to English-reading devotees of Sri Ramakrishna by translating Akshay Kumar Sen's verse biography *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* from Bengali into English. In doing so, they have made a major contribution to the Ramakrishna canon.

Aside from the length of the original (639 pages), the translators' task was complicated by the fact that the *Punthi* is essentially an epic poem in archaic Bengali whose narrative line is often interrupted by emotional outbursts of praise for Sri Ramakrishna. Poetry is notoriously difficult to translate, and archaic poetry is even more so. Translators who want to create an archaic effect in English usually revert to the language of the King James version of the Bible, with all its 'thees' and 'thous' and 'wherefores'. The 'emotional outbursts', too, may strike some readers as excessive. In the Preface, the chief editor expresses the fear that western readers will find them fanatical and verbose.

The translators dealt with these difficulties by wisely opting for a prose translation. Mercifully for the reader, they avoided the 'thee-and-thou' pitfall in favour of contemporary English. They considered abridging the 'emotional outbursts', but decided to retain them on the very valid grounds that omitting them would compromise the integrity of the author's work.

Readers of different temperaments will react differently to the result, but this crusty old Anglo-Saxon was charmed by the guileless and enthusiastic tone of the narrative, and even by the fervour of the 'outbursts'.

Each chapter leads off with a verse that, with some variations, reads like this:

Glory, glory be to Ramakrishna,
the lord of the universe.

Glory, glory be to the Mother guru,
the mother of the universe.

Glory, glory be to all the devotees
of both of them.

This humble person begs for
the dust of the feet of all.

This verse encapsulates a theological viewpoint which Akshay constantly reiterates: that Sri

Ramakrishna was actually God, and all the events in his life were nothing but his *lila*, his divine play as he sported on earth disguised as a man. This viewpoint is so pervasive that the book might well have been titled *The Divine Play of Sri Ramakrishna*. Akshay maintains that the Master was primarily a bhakta, who advocated Naradiya bhakti as the easiest and most effective spiritual path for this age. He portrays Sri Ramakrishna as consistently opening up believers in the formless God to the idea that God not only assumes forms, but also incarnates himself as a human being.

The narrative follows the traditional accounts, but with some minor variations in detail. Akshay mentions that the boy Gadadhar went into samadhi at the sight of clouds (p. 15), but he says nothing about the flock of cranes which play a conspicuous role in the traditional account. (However, he may have been referring to a different incident.) He says Sri Ramakrishna had the vision of a luminous person with a long beard on the first day of his Islamic sadhana (p. 165), whereas the traditional accounts put it on the third day. He does not mention the Master's vision of Jesus, but he does mention visions of churches with sermons being preached (pp. 166-7). He gives a detailed account of Sri Ramakrishna's last days and passing away (at which he was present), but oddly enough he gets the year wrong—1883 instead of 1886 (p. 856).

Most of these discrepancies can be explained by the possibility that Akshay may not have been present on some of the occasions when Sri Ramakrishna was recounting his sadhanas in detail. Getting the year wrong would be perfectly natural for someone accustomed to thinking in terms of the Bengali rather than the English calendar.

As the narrative progresses, Akshay increasingly inserts summaries of the Master's teachings. Sometimes these are paraphrases, sometimes direct quotations. Sometimes they take up entire chapters. They give the narrative additional depth. Akshay relates some anecdotes which, so far as I know, are not available in other accounts, such as incidents at various *kirtans* held in Kamarpukur and Sihore. There are also some incidents during Sri Ramakrishna's last days which (again, so far as I know) are not recorded elsewhere.

In one of the most amusing incidents (pp. 601-2), Niranjan once joined in a *kirtan* while carrying a bottle of wine that Sri Ramakrishna wanted to

use in a Tantric ritual. So as not to shock the devotees, Niranjan hid the bottle under his armpit. While he was dancing, the bottle crashed to the floor and broke. But when the devotees examined it, they found that it smelled like D. Gupta's elixir, a popular medicine of the day. News of this reached the ears of Girish Ghosh while he was drinking, and he scoffed in disbelief. Immediately the wine he was drinking began to smell like D. Gupta's elixir. Every bottle he opened smelled the same. This unnerved Girish so much that he quit drinking for the rest of the day.

Akshay gives us intimate personal details about Sri Ramakrishna, which are not readily available elsewhere; such as the fact that he was a little under six feet tall (p. 230), had very soft feet (p. 658), tired easily when walking (p. 531), was inexpert at smoking the hubble-bubble (p. 585), never liked to eat before others were served (p. 699), and had a preference for red-bordered dhotis (p. 658).

All this makes the book a treasure for devotees. It promises to take its place alongside *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* as an indispensable component of the Ramakrishna canon. 'Akshay' means immortal, and with this work Akshay Kumar Sen has made himself immortal.

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Indian Opinion

More than a hundred years ago, Sri Akshay Kumar Sen, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*, a 639-page masterpiece in which he related the events of the Master's life—*lila* as he called it—vis-a-vis the Master's disciples and devotees. Sen called his work *Punthi* because he composed it in verse form.

What made Akshay Sen take to this work? Ever since he, an employee in the celebrated Tagore family, came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna in 1885, he observed the divine plays of the Master at close quarters. He received Ramakrishna's blessings on Kalpataru Day (1 January 1886) with the latter whispering a mantra into his ear. Akshay also had the rare opportunity of being at the Master's bedside at the request of Swami Vivekananda, fanning him on that fateful night of 16 August 1886 when he entered into *mahāsamādhi*.

Affectionately called 'female ghost' (*śāṅkhi-cūni*) by Swamiji for his not-too-pleasing appearance, Akshay's life was transformed by the Master's touch. He was an eyewitness to similar trans-

formation in the lives of many admirers of the Master. It is this fact, plus his realization that the Master was the Lord of the universe in human form and also his consequent urge to let people know this truth, that made him compose the *Punthi*.

Akshay collected material meticulously, supplementing his personal observations with interviews of intimate admirers; Devendranath Mazumdar (who introduced Akshay to Sri Ramakrishna), Girish Ghosh, Swamis Yogananda, Niranjanananda and Ramakrishnananda helped him much. Swami Vivekananda read part of his book, encouraged him to continue, and took him to Holy Mother for blessings. Mother blessed the author with the assurance that his work would be completed without any difficulty. The work was completed in due course. Swamiji was then in the United States. He went through the first edition and exclaimed (in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda) that 'through his pen Sri Ramakrishna is manifesting himself,' and 'a hundred thousand hearty embraces from me' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, p. 334).

While this one, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* are as authentic as any biographical work could be, they differ in style, purpose, and coverage. While the *Gospel* (concerned more about his words) covers only the last five years of Sri Ramakrishna's life, the *Great Master* (meant to be an interpretative biography) covers the period between his birth till he was shifted to the Cossipore Garden House in December 1885. It is only the *Punthi* that covers the entire life of Ramakrishna—from birth to *mahāsamādhi*. Thus, the *Punthi* occupies a very special place in the Ramakrishna canon.

Owing to their different purposes, the three works differ significantly in style also. 'M' is absent in the *Gospel*. He chronicles and records, but does not either relate anything himself or interpret anything. Swami Saradanandaji both relates and interprets. This was absolutely necessary as a person of Saradananda's stature, scholarship and spiritual attainments could understand and explain the superhuman ways of Sri Ramakrishna. Akshay Sen is a poet. His work is an epic poem and a poet has every freedom to write with emotion. So, Sen might appear to be a bit archaic in his style to a modern reader. He begins each chapter (91, in five parts), with a prayer addressed to Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother. He uses the phrase 'O my mind, now listen,' as a way of addressing readers, repeats the same idea within a few lines for emphasis, and shows intense emotional fervour in relating and interpreting the events of Ramakrishna's life. All this is certainly not modern, but such was the style in vogue in epic poems like the Bengali *Ramayana*

and *Mahabharata*, composed by Krittivasa and Kashiram Das respectively; Akshay was only following the traditional style.

In providing an 864-page English translation, supplemented with 24 pages of Glossary and Index, and in titling it *A Portrait of Sri Ramakrishna*, the translators-cum-editors of the book have done a job comparable at once to that of Swami Nikhilananda (who translated the *Gospel* from the Bengali *Ramakrishna Kathamrita*) or Swami Jagadananda (who translated the *Great Master* from the Bengali *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*). Swami Nikhilananda's translation came out in 1942, and Jagadananda's in 1952. With Seshadri Iyer's earlier translation of the *Punthi* lying unpublished, Akshay Sen had to wait till 1998 for being presented to non-Bengali-knowing, English-speaking readers. At long last, however, the translators have done a remarkable job in presenting

Akshay's story of the Master and deserve the heartfelt thanks of all readers of the book. By reading this book, the world will know for certain that Ramakrishna lived to give human beings an awareness of their true nature, which was 'timeless awareness', and that in so doing, he provided, as Lex Hixon puts it, 'a master key that opens all cultures and all hearts' (*Great Swan*, p. viii). Indeed, the translation is as spiritually inspiring as Sen's original work, and herein lies the fulfilment of the translators' and editors' efforts. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture has to be appreciated for making this exquisitely produced work, of about 900 pages, available at an incredibly low price.

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BOOKS RECEIVED



We thankfully acknowledge receipt of the following books by Dr V. Raghavan, published by Punarvasu, 7 Sri Krishnapuram Street, Royapettah, Madras 600014:

Śrī Kāmākṣī-Māṭṛkāstavaḥ (Sanskrit). Year not mentioned. Pp. 16. Rs.2.

The Two Brothers Rama and Lakshmana. 1976. Pp. 44. Rs.15.

Śrī Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī Pañcapañcāśatka Stotram (Sanskrit-Tamil). Pp. 16. Year and price not mentioned.

Pratāparudra-Vijaya or Vidyānātha-Viḍambana: A Parody in Four Acts (Sanskrit). Year not mentioned. Pp. xix+31. Rs.15.

Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita Caritam: Mahākāvyaṃ (Sanskrit). 1980. Pp. iv+213. Rs.25.



Saundaryalaharī of Śaṅkarācārya with the commentary of Śrī Lakṣmidhara: Translated by Kalluri Suryanarayana. Published by Sankhyayana Vidya Parishad, H. No. 2-12-34 Annapurna Colony, Uppal, Hyderabad 500039. 1999. Pp. 187. Rs.108.



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News and Reports

SECOND PHASE OF THE CENTENARY OF THE ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI

During the second phase of the centenary of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, a series of lectures, followed in most cases by a lively question-answer session, were arranged in eight selected colleges and five selected schools in the district of Champawat, during the period from 4 to 8 October 1999. The theme was 'Personality Development of the Youth and Swami Vivekananda'. Swami Nikhileswaranandaji, editor of the Ramakrishna Order's Gujarati monthly *Ramakrishna Jyot*, was the speaker.

A public meeting was also held in Lohaghat on 8 October. The topic of discussion was 'The Message of Practical Vedanta Preached and Propagated by Advaita Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission During the Last One Hundred Years'. On 9 October a youth convention with 167 boys and girls, and on 10 October a spiritual retreat for 52 adult participants were held at Mother Sevier's Bungalow, Mayavati.

Those who spoke at the public meeting, youth convention and spiritual retreat were Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; Sri Navin Chandra Sharma, District Magistrate, Champawat; Swami Vandananandaji Maharaj, a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math; Swami Jitatmanandaji, President of Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot; and Swami Mumukshanandaji, President of Advaita Ashrama.

Inspiring books and leaflets on the life and message of Swami Vivekananda were distributed among the students and staff of the educational institutions and among the participants of the youth convention and spiritual retreat.

THE DARKEST DAYS OF ORISSA

It was the previous millennium's last challenge to humanity. While science stood proudly on the victory stand, glad about all its marvellous achievements, nature gave a stunning blow to its pride. With all its grand achievements, science could not predict the disaster, much less help gather at least some information about the extent of damage even after 48 hours or more. This was the situation in Orissa, which suffered the worst cyclonic disaster of the previous century last November. Days went by but the best of efforts could not estimate the amount of loss or, what is more, reach the victims. To help the victims was beyond the question during the first few days after the calamity. People waited anxiously for help. Mothers clung desperately to life so that they could feed their starving children till their end. Air dropping of food articles by the government was hardly sufficient. The situation was far worse than grim.

The Orissa tragedy is perhaps the worst of the past century so far as India is concerned. The estimated loss of lives touched an alarming 10,000 and more. The subsequent neglect of the thousands of marooned, suffering villagers added to the count. Disease, starvation, cold, thirst—all vied with each other to take their toll. Thousands of buildings are gone, highways are now riverbeds, crops are now underwater plants, deep in the sea. Animals like cattle are a rarity. Hundreds of villages are wiped out. When the situation was such, NGOs took over. Social service organizations fought bravely: they jumped into the arena with the best of intentions and did their utmost to help the suffering thousands—to search out and burn corpses, to prevent spread of epidemics, etc. Corpses, corpses everywhere—hapless animals and helpless human beings! But social service organizations were undaunted. What with their limited resources, the NGOs are struggling even now to bring normality in the vast region. One such organization to come to the unfortunate people's aid was the Ramakrishna Mission.

Imagine the situation: 500 people living in a small monastery, which itself is damaged because of the cyclone! The Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar, worked round the clock to provide relief to the 500 occupants. Stories are told of the bravery, heroism, and self-sacrifice of the monks there. Food, clothing, medicines, shelter, solace—all were provided to the terror-stricken, bereaved people. That apart, the Mission monks strove to their utmost to provide all help to the thousands that had resorted to schools, colleges, and other public buildings in various parts of the marooned areas. Relief operations are continuing in full swing. Thanks to the generous public's help, the Mission proposes to render as much service as it can to the distressed. The problems are too numerous to list. To render service, too, is not all that easy. But still, these monks are working with all their heart. And this exactly is Swami Vivekananda's religion: to die, if needed, for the sake of others!